



Figure 1The Isaiah Scroll

The Genesis Creation Accounts

An Updated Translation

Introduction

The first and second creation stories presents two allegorical views of worldly creation. Both stories are arguably the best-known stories in all of literature but they are surely the most controversial narratives in the Bible – controversial because, when read as a historical or scientific account of physical creation their truths are contradicted by both historical and scientific reality. This controversy need not exist. When read in their cultural and linguistic context they reveal theological and philosophical truths largely unrelated to historical or scientific reality.

The first creation account describes a transcendent, authoritative, and judgmental God who has appointed mankind to rule over His creation as His vice-regent. In this account, the deity, God, represents for the first and only time in written history, the expression ethical monotheism – the two-fold idea that there is but one God whose exercise of authority, unlike those of the pagan gods surrounding the ancient Hebrews, is guided by ethics not capriciousness.

The second creation account takes a qualitatively different approach. Unlike the first story, God is not portrayed as transcendent or other-worldly. Rather, the God of the second creation story exists in the same realm and timeframe as do his creations - notably the primordial couple, Adam and Eve. Moreover, He is a hands-on creator forming mankind and the animals from the earth as an artist forms raw clay into a statue. The narrative arc of this account reveals the author's intent to show how

mankind came to be separated from God, where the reason for the separation was mankind's rejection of a benign utopia for a mortal life of procreativity.

In this class we will move beyond the literalism of the fundamentalist, both religious and secular, in order to engage some of the most enduring theological (or philosophical if you're secularly inclined) truths of the Judeo-Christian faith traditions – such as:

- Ethical monotheism and its alternative - moral relativism.
- How the faiths of the Judeo-Christian tradition are largely complementary, not antagonistic to scientific reality?
- An omniscient God in an indeterminate universe?
- Why humankind chose the ephemeral existence of the mortal life over an eternal but benign existence in utopia?
- The nature of sin and theodicy (why bad things happen to good people).
- Free will.
- How humankind's separation from God was necessarily physical, not spiritual, and not the catastrophe as often imagined?

These, and other, divinely revealed truths constitute much of the bedrock upon which the Judeo-Christian moral tradition stands.

Translation - In the Beginning

Day 1

When God first created the heavens and the earth, the earth had been formless and void; and darkness was over the surface of the abyss and the spirit of God hovered over its waters. Then God said,

"Let light come into being."

And light came into being. And God saw the light was good. And the light alternated with the darkness. Then God faced the light and proclaimed,

*"Day!"*¹

And, facing the darkness, He proclaimed,

"Night!"

And there was evening and there was morning - a first day.

Day 2²

Then God said,

"Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters separating water from water."

And God made the expanse such that the waters below were separated from the waters above. And it was so. And God faced the expanse and proclaimed,

"Skies!"

And it was evening and it was morning, a second day.

Day 3

And God said to the waters,

"Collect yourselves from below the skies into one place that the dry ground may appear."

And it was so. And God proclaimed to the dry land,

"Earth!"

And to the collection of waters He proclaimed,

"Seas!"

¹ Note that night and day are regions of space, not units of time.

² This is the only day God does not judge as good (or bad).

And God saw that it was good. And God said:

“May the earth, by itself, produce vegetation, herbs yielding seed after its kind, and trees of fruit making fruit upon the earth, after its kind, containing its seeds.”

And it was so – the earth, on its own, had brought forth vegetation - herbs yielding seed after its kind, and trees making fruit but only in season³ with seeds after its kind; and God saw that was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, a third day.

Day 4

And God said,

"Let there be lights in the expanse of the skies distributed between the night and the day. And they will serve as signs and for seasons, and for days and for years. And they will serve as lights in the expanse of the skies shining on the earth."

And it was so. Then God made two great lights - the big light for ruling the day and the small light and the stars for ruling the night. And God set them in the expanse of the skies to shine on the earth and to preside over the day and the night as well as to separate the light from the dark. And God saw that was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

Day 5

And God said,

“Let the waters swarm with living creatures. And let flying creatures soar above the earth across the expanse of the skies”.

And so God created the great sea monsters, and every creeping living thing that swarms [in] the water according to its kind, and every winged flying creature according to its kind. And God saw it was good. And God blessed them, saying,

³ The earth failed to produce exactly what God requested. Still, God judges his creations on the third day as good.

“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”

And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

Day 6

And God said,

"Let the earth, on its own, bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind."

And it was so. Thus, made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and domesticated beasts of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said,

"Let us make humankind as our image, according to our likeness; that they may rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind as His image.

As the image of God He created humankind⁴.

Male and female He created them

And God blessed them. Then God said to them,

"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subjugate it; but over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth you will rule."

God said,

⁴ The original text has a masculine singular pronoun with the antecedent ‘humankind’ - a singular collective noun like flock or herd. It is the collective humankind that bears the image of God, not the individual male and female humans.

"See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food."

And it was so.

God saw all that had been made and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Day 7

Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude.

And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done,
and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

Then God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God ceased from all the work that he had done in creation.⁵

These, then, were the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Translation - The Story of Adam and Eve

When the LORD God made earth and skies⁶, all the wild plants were not yet present in the earth and the cultivated plants were not yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not yet caused the rain to fall upon the earth nor was there a man to cultivate the soil. So, rain clouds arose from the earth and all the surface of the ground was caused to drink.

Next, the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man came to life. Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden toward the East; and there He placed the man whom He had formed.

⁵ The 3-fold repetition of 'seven' is a Hebrew poetic form meant to focus our attention on the number seven, a symbol of completeness. Or more contextually, the perfection of a process. The same device is in view in Adam's exultant exclamation about Eve (see below).

⁶ This appears in most Bibles as the last sentence of the first creation story

And from the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the eye and good for food; in the midst of the garden there was the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad⁷.

*(Now, a river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold and the gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there. The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.)*⁸

Now, the LORD God having placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and maintain it warned⁹ the man, saying,

"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you should not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad, for when you do, you will surely become mortal and subject to death."

Then the LORD God said,

"For the man to be by himself is not good. I will make for him a redeemer as a complement to him".

(But the LORD God had already formed out of the ground all the living animals of the field and all the flying things of the air. Moreover, He had brought each of them before the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that became its name. Thus the man had given names to

⁷ From the Hebrew *tov vara*, *vara* can mean "and evil", "and bad", or "and unsuitable". Its proper translation is context dependent.

⁸ Parenthetical verses are commonly used in the Hebrew Bible to be a means by which narrative tension is produced. The narrative picks up where it left off after the rivers are described – hence the parenthesis.

⁹ From the Hebrew *vayatzav*, which is most commonly translated as commanded – except when context suggests it is a warning as in this case (here, for example, is the NLT's translation: But the LORD God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden).

all the beasts, and to the birds of the sky, and to all the wild beasts. But for Adam, a redeemer complementary to him had not been found.)¹⁰

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to come over the man and he slept. Next, He took from one side a rib then closed the flesh below it. Then the LORD God built a woman from the rib that He had taken from the man. Then He brought her to the man. And the man exulted, saying,

*“At last, this¹¹ is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.
For this reason, she will be called woman
because from this man this was taken.”*

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and stand by his woman for they will be one flesh. And the man and his wife were both nude but were not ashamed¹².

Now the serpent was shrewd¹³, more than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made, so he said to the woman,

“Did God really say, ‘if either of you eat from any tree in the garden you will become mortal and subject to death?’”

And the woman answered the serpent,

“From the fruit of all the trees of the garden we may eat. However, from the fruit of the tree which [is] in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘you should not eat from it, nor touch it¹⁴, lest you become mortal and subject to death.’”

So the serpent said to the woman,

“It is not certain you will become mortal, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will open and you will become like gods, knowing good and bad.”

¹⁰ Op cit. – like #5 above, these verses are intended to provide color and narrative tension

¹¹ The 3-fold repetition of ‘this’ (zot) is a Hebrew poetic form meant to focus our attention on the woman.

¹² This verse is an editorial comment by the author and not, strictly speaking, part of the narrative.

¹³ A typical Hebrew play on words: Adam and Eve were arummim (nude) and her interlocutor, the serpent, was arum (shrewd).

¹⁴ Nowhere in the text does God tell the couple not to “touch” the tree. This is an enlargement of God’s warning and foreshadows later biblical teaching that we are not to change God’s words.

And the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and delightful to the eye, but also [was] desirable for reasoning. So, she plucked fruit from the tree and ate it and she also gave some to her husband who was with her; and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked¹⁵; so, they each sewed a fig leaf and made for each a girdle to cover their loins¹⁶.

Then they heard the thunder¹⁷ of the LORD God rolling through the garden during the wind storm. So, the man and his wife hid among the trees of the garden from the LORD God. Then the LORD God called out and said to the man,

“Where are you?”

And the man answered,

*“I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid so I hid because I was naked.”*¹⁸

Then God said,

“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I warned you not to eat?”

And the man answered,

“The woman whom You gave to be with me? She gave to me from the tree, and I ate.”

Then the LORD God said to the woman,

“What is this you have done?”

And the woman replied,

¹⁵ The Hebrew word *daat* means carnal knowledge especially the intimate knowledge from having physically experienced the nakedness of someone other than oneself.

¹⁶ Significantly, they only cover their genitals; again calling into view the sexual aspect of their embarrassment.

¹⁷ Translated from *qol* which is normally translated as sound or voice. The context here suggests a divine storm theophany.

¹⁸ Note that Adam was not afraid because he had ‘disobeyed’ and was going to die. Rather, he was afraid because he was naked.

“The serpent led me astray, and I ate.”

The LORD God then turned to the serpent and said,

“Because you did this, cursed are you more than all domesticated beasts, and more than every wild animal; on your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring, hers shall bruise you on the head, and yours shall bruise him on the heel.”

To the woman he said,

“Outside of Eden, your pains in childbearing will be greatly increased. With pain you will give birth to children, but towards your husband you will turn¹⁹ and he will take care of you.

But to Adam He said,

“Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate from the tree about which I warned you saying, ‘You should not eat from it’; cursed is the ground²⁰. In toil you shall eat the produce of the ground. And thorn and thistle will be caused to grow for you.”

“And you will eat cultivated plants. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread until you return to the ground. For from it you were taken because dust you were and to dust you will return.”

Then, the LORD God made tunics of skin for Adam and his wife. Thus they were clothed. Then the LORD God said,

“Behold, mankind has become like one of Us, knowing good and bad.”

¹⁹Most English Bibles mistakenly translate the Hebrew word in this verse as ‘desire’. This mistake arises from a copyist mistake called a [parablepsis](#).

²⁰ The ground isn’t being punished. God is conveying to Adam the consequences of having to cultivate the earth outside of Eden – in the real world. In this verse, ‘curse’ means restricted to, or constrained.



Figure 2 The Expulsion

Thus, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever, the LORD God expelled them from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which the man was taken. So He drove mankind out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the flaming, ever-turning sword along with the cherubim to prevent their return to the tree of life.

Proposed Course Schedule

Session I

About the Bible

- *History (when written, by whom)*
- *Languages Compared: English and Biblical Hebrew*
- *Hebrew word: tov – good, evil, bad, acceptable, or suitable*
- *Literary Devices in the Bible*
- *Setting the ANE Context*
- *Reading Genesis 1:1-3:24*

Discussion

Session II

Days 1, 2, 3

- *Reading Genesis 1:1 – 13*
- *Creatio Ex Nihilo vs. ex Materia – importance of Hebrew Grammar*
- *The first seven days: Temporal vs. Spatial?*
- *Ethical Monotheism – Transcendent*
- *Genesis 1:11-12: reconciling God's omnipotence with Science and the indeterminate universe.*

Discussion

Session III

Days 4, 5, 6, 7

- *Reading Genesis 1:14-2:4a*
- *To be the image and likeness of God*
- *Genesis 1:27-28: mankind's dominion over nature*
- *Genesis 2:1-4a – the Sabbath*

Discussion

Session IV

- *Reading Genesis 2:4b-17*
- *Hebrew parallelism – why did God create mankind?*
- *The nature of man – the yetzer hatov and the yetzer hara*
- *The Garden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge*
- *The Creation of Eve*

Discussion

Session V

- *Reading Genesis 2:18-3:24*
- *The creation of Eve*
- *Biblical Marriage*
- *From innocence to sexual awareness*
- *The Expulsion*

Discussion

Session VI - Summary

- **Recap: The First Creation Story**
 - *The creative authority of God*
 - *Time and Ethics*
 - *Divine omnipotence and God's intervention in history*
 - *Mankind's rule over nature*

The Genesis creation accounts

- *The purpose of the Sabbath*
 - Recap: The Second Creation Story
 - *What makes man human?*
 - *Immortality and Utopia rejected: Sin and Free Will*
- Discussion

Supplemental Readings

First Creation Story

[15 Myths About Bible Translations](#)

Nova Video: [The Illusion of Time](#)

[Trees of Fruit](#)

[Part I – The Image of God](#)

[Part II - The Image of God](#)

[Part I – The Sabbath](#)

[Part II – The Sabbath](#)

Second Creation Story

[Because It Had Not Rained](#)

[On Being Human](#)

[Eve Misrepresents God](#)

[Was the Fruit Really Forbidden?](#)

[Why Adam and Eve Did Not Die](#)

[The Biblical Nature of Evil](#)

[Part I – Do Husbands Rule Over Their Wives](#)

[Part II – Do Husbands Rule Over Their Wives](#)

[Podcast: Women and the Flourishing of Mankind](#)

References

Below are the references used in this translation. However, the titles of those works I used the most extensively and which I strongly recommend have been bolded. Many of these, with few exceptions, can be obtained from your public library. In my case, I used the resources of the King County Library System (KCLS.org).

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