

Genesis 1 as a Theological-Political Narrative of Kingdom Establishment

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Genesis 1 presents in cosmogonic form a theological-political narrative justifying God's claim to whatever exists, especially to the land on which the Pentateuch focuses. Behind this expression of a royal land ideology lie presuppositions about divine kingship and the land. I detail how this interpretation helps us understand the first creation account as narrating God's establishment of his kingdom and creation of stewards and suggest a reason why the author of Genesis may have believed a justification was necessary.

Key Words: creation, kingdom of God, land, imago Dei (image of God), divine kingship

Some have interpreted Gen 1:1-2:3 as serving a quasi-scientific function, others as mythically purveying in theological garb existential concerns about human existence.¹ The former view reflects a long tradition of interpretation that treats the text as a primitive "scientific" account of how God originated the universe and its contents. It provides the Hebraic response to the ancient question why things exist and are as they are. "On the whole, events recounted in the Creation and Flood accounts do not belong to the field of historical research at all. Rather, they fall in the domain of the natural sciences—astronomy, geology, and biology."² According to the latter

1. This disjunct is not exhaustive. Others, to whom we shall allude below, suggest that the intent of the author(s) was to counter rival cosmologies and theologies, for example, about the nature and number of gods and human value and function.

2. John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 7.

view, characteristic of the critical tradition, Gen 1 and following neither record history nor report science but narrate mythically the ancients' perception of reality and their precarious place in it. "Out of the questioning of threatened man in a threatened world arose the question about the beginning and end, about coming into existence and ceasing to exist. . . . The background was an existential, not an intellectual problem."³

In what follows I argue that the text's focus on God as the primary actor and its locus preceding both the removal of disobedient or willful persons from the land and the promise and eventual allocation of the land to select persons suggest that the creation narrative of Gen 1 is more than a quasi-scientific account or existential piece. The opening narrative, in detailing God's kingdom-building, functions also as a theological-political document that describes how the Supreme Monarch establishes his kingdom and thereby justifies his claim to exclusive possession of everything in it. Establishing just claim to the land is critical, for the remainder of the Hexateuch focuses on how God administers and parcels out a particular portion of his land, selecting and assisting a group of persons to occupy and labor on it.⁴ I unpack the background presuppositions about monarch and land, detail how the Genesis narrator viewed this supreme act of kingdom establishment, and indicate that, although the tenor of this political treatise is consonant with the ancient Near Eastern perspective, the narrator spins the story to his own ends.

THE TEXT AS THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL DOCUMENT

"The primeval story as a whole points in two directions: toward the center of the Old Testament itself and beyond, and toward the pre-history of the Old Testament and beyond to the beginning of the world and of the human race."⁵ Although connecting the two can prove problematic, the interpreter can facilitate it by understanding the ideology of the text. Habel, for example, writes that "texts are a production that is part of the social and political process that reflects

3. Claus Westermann, *Creation* (London: SPCK, 1974), 13-14, 11.

4. "What is the reason that (the Torah) begins with the Book of Genesis? Because it wished to convey the message of the verse, 'The power of His acts He told to His people in order to give them the estate of the nations: So that if the nations of the world will say to Israel, 'You are bandits for you conquered the lands of the seven nations who inhabited the land of Canaan,' (Israel) will say to them, 'The whole earth belongs to the Holy One, Blessed is He. He created it and he gave it to the one found proper in his eyes. By His wish He gave it to them, and by His wish He took it from them, and gave it to us' (*The Torah, with Rashi's Commentary* 1 [Brooklyn, Mesorah Publications, 1995], 2).

5. Claus Westermann, *Genesis: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 64.

the ideology of the proponents."⁶ We shall treat Gen 1 as expressing, in significant measure, a royal land ideology, and in doing so the very questions Habel poses of other notable texts expressing land ideologies—where is the location of God in the cosmic and social scheme of things, where is the locus of power, on what grounds is claim to the land justified—are precisely the questions in terms of which we can understand the opening story of Genesis viewed in light of the remainder of the book and the Pentateuch as a whole. In doing so, we treat the Gen 1 creation text as a theological-political document relating the King to the land.

GOD AS KING

Levenson writes,

In spite of some demurrals, there is today wide agreement among scholars that the theology of the Pentateuch is deeply imbued with the idiom of the Near Eastern suzerainty treaty: YHWH, acting in the role of an emperor, cites the record of his benefactions to his needy vassal Israel and elicits from her a sworn commitment to observe the stipulations he imposes, to the benefit of both so long as she keeps faith.⁷

Given that the idiom of a suzerainty treaty influences the Pentateuch, the theme of God as ruler, envisioned in many ways as other ancient Near East cultures conceived of powerful monarchs, underlies the initial creation story that introduces the extended narrative. God says and it happens, names and it is his, sets his representative images throughout the land, sits and pronounces in council, establishes the cultic, and is the ultimate arbiter of what is good.

Various OT texts enrich the background motif, portraying God as a powerful monarch, much to be feared, more awesome than "all who surround him" (Ps 89:7). God sits enthroned over all creation, powerful of voice, to have nature do his bidding (Pss 29, 95-97). Not only does God dwell in heaven (Deut 26:15; 1 Kgs 8:30),⁸ it is his seat

6. Norman C. Habel, *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 15. Habel addresses the ideological force of the text as a political product and hence is interested in questions having to do with rulership of the land, the location of God as ruler, the charter justifying entitlement to the land, and the right to the land.

7. Jon D. Levenson, "Creation and Covenant," in *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology* (ed. B. C. Ollenburger, E. A. Martens, and G. F. Hasel; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 433.

8. This is consistent with the ancient view that the temple (Isa 8:18) or mountains were divine abodes. "Such an earthly sanctuary could be made to symbolize, or represent, the cosmic divine abode. As a result one god could have more than one sanctuary

of divine government (Gen 11:5; Exod 20:22; Ps 47). Like earthly monarchs, God rules by decree (Ps 148:1-8; Jer 31:35; Job 28:26).⁹ Rendering judgment, God presides over a royal court (Ps 82:1)¹⁰ to whom he announces important decisions¹¹ and whose members function as counselors (Ps 89:7; Jer 23:18)¹² and political subordinates (1 Kgs 22:19-22).

God's messengers serve the court, traveling throughout the kingdom and returning with reports about what occurs (Gen 28:12; Job 1:6-7; Zech 1:11). They possess the power to speak on behalf of the King, doing so in the first person (Gen 16:7-13; see also 19:21; 31:11-13; Exod 3:2-3).¹³

Yahweh is portrayed as the leader of armies, the Lord of hosts. He not only leads Israel's army (1 Sam 17:45) and hence is given

or temple, which did not mean that he possessed more than one dwelling-place, but only that there were several copies of his one true dwelling-place which remained remote from the world of men." Ronald E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 2. See Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, "YHWH Sabaoth: The Heavenly King on the Cherubim Throne," in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays* (ed. T. Ishida; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1982), 119-23.

9. In Egypt the pharaoh ruled by personal decree. Even when the vizier dispensed the law, "what the vizier dispensed was customary law, phrased as the commanding word of pharaoh and arising out of pharaoh's three qualities of Authority, Perception, and Justice. . . . In Egypt, the law was personally derived from the god-king and was tailored as justice and equity to the individual appellant." John A. Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 172-73.

10. Parallels can be found in Egyptian kingship. "All deliberations preceding governmental actions appear entirely one-sided in that Pharaoh 'took counsel in making . . . disclosures' The account of Senusert I shows the king opening the meeting by saying, 'Behold, My Majesty decrees a work and is thinking of a deed'; and the councilors answer: 'Authoritative Utterance is (in) thy mouth, Understanding follows thee. O Sovereign (Life! Prosperity! Health!), it is thy plans which come to pass!'" Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 76.

11. "Before proceeding to the creation of humankind, God announces his momentous intention to do so. Both in itself and in the language employed, this announcement recalls the scene in a royal council chamber in which a king announces his impending action to the members of his court. . . . Moreover, God's assignment of specific provisions for humanity (vv. 29-30) recalls the royal assignment of food at the king's table (cf. Gen 43:34; 47:22; 2 Sam 9:7, 13; 19:28 . . .)." John H. Stek, "What Says the Scripture?" in *Portraits of Creation* (ed. Howard J. Van Till; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 233. Gordon J. Wenham notes that the standard view of Jewish commentators was that the use of the plural—"let us"—in the creation of humans (Gen 1:26) indicated an announcement of God to his court. *Genesis 1-15* (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), 27.

12. In contrast to the gods of Mesopotamia, God's actions are not subject to council approval. E. A. Speiser, "Mesopotamia," *Supplement to JAOS* 74/3 (1954), 10. His relation to advisers is closer to that of the Egyptian pharaohs. J. N. Wilson, "Egypt," *Supplement*, 4.

13. Administration of the kingdom in Egypt required a similar structure. Wilson, *Culture*. . . , 79-80.

credit for the battle victories, but leads the hosts of heaven (Ps 68:17; 103:21). His commanders speak (Josh 5:14-15) and act on his behalf (2 Kgs 19:35).¹⁴ Even more to the point, the designation Yahweh *sēbā'ôt*¹⁵ is connected to God's royal function.¹⁶ God is the almighty one, Lord of everything, on whose behalf the prophets speak.¹⁷

Although the kingdom of God extends throughout the universe (the heavens and the earth), the primary focus in the Pentateuch is on the land. The whole earth (land) is God's (Exod 9:29; 19:5).¹⁸ The scope more narrowly focuses on a portion of this land that eventually Yahweh gives to his chosen people to settle. As Yahweh's land, it is not to be sold permanently, for technically it does not belong to its inhabitants; they are "but aliens and my tenants," only holding the land for its true owner, Yahweh (Lev 25:23-24). The ideological framework of a gift or grant is "in social or political terms the continuous reminder that the Israelites who invaded the land have not earned the land . . . but are in total indebtedness and dependency on YHWH."¹⁹ God grants the Israelites the land as part of a covenant.

14. "The position of the Mesopotamian king in war was that of leader of the army. Very few Assyrian kings entrusted an army to such a top military official as the *turtānu*, who by his rank commanded one-half of the entire military might. Even the achievements of the *turtānu* were frequently reported by the king in the first-person singular." A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 102. In Egypt too the king personally headed his armies (Wilson, *Culture . . .*, 173), as attested in Exod 14. What is perhaps distinctive is the view that Yahweh heads the heavenly hosts. "When all is said and done, there is to my knowledge nothing in the Ugaritic material known to date which indicates a technical use of *sbu* to mean a celestial host, comparable with the Hebrew **צבא השמים**. The view that the Sabaoth designation should be traced to a pre-Israelite title can therefore not be supported. By all appearances, it is a genuinely Israelite creation, originating in a milieu where the El qualities of YHWH played an important role" (Mettinger, "YHWH Sabaoth," 135).

15. Whereas J. Alberto Soggin sees the YHWH *sēbā'ôt* designation as characteristic of the postexilic temple (*Introduction to the Old Testament* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1987], 153), Mettinger argues that Yahweh's enthronement as YHWH Sabaoth, because of its connection with the cherubim formula ("YHWH Sabaoth, who is enthroned on the cherubim") "had its *Sitz im Leben* [though not its origin] in the milieu of the Solomonic temple" (Mettinger, "YHWH Sabaoth," 117).

16. Some argue that, despite the fact that the Hebrew root *sāba* means "soldier" in cognate languages and "hosts" is used to refer at times to armies (Exod 7:4), YHWH *sēbā'ôt* occurs in contexts that are more royal than military (e.g., 1 Sam 4:4; 15:2-3; 17:45; 2 Sam 6:2; 7:26--27). J. P. Ross, "Yahweh *sēbā'ôt* in Samuel and Psalms," *VT* 17 (1967): 76-92.

17. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1.191-94.

18. Egyptian cosmology expresses a similar view. "Section V (of the Memphite Theology), the account of creation, ends by assigning to the Creator the kingly title 'Lord of the Two Lands.'" Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 32.

19. Habel, *The Land is Mine*, 39.

"The Ebal ceremony (Deut 27) reflects the elements of a land grant ceremony within the wider treaty structure. The stones, the land gift, the witnesses, and the curses are all typical of grants that give legal title to new occupants of land."²⁰ However, the grant is conditional; retaining the land depends upon those who agreed to the covenant with Yahweh keeping their part of the bargain.²¹

In short, the background motif is of God as supreme monarch who allocates the land to those he selects, even assisting them in possessing it, while dispossessing others.

CONCEPTS OF THE RULER AND KINGDOM

At least two models of divine rule can be found in the OT. The Israelite premonarchical notion²² is that God rules his kingdom not mediately through any earthly king but directly. The early leaders, Moses and Joshua, do not turn their families into dynasties; when offered the position of ruler, Gideon refuses, asserting that "The Lord will rule over you" (Judg 8:23).²³ One also can understand the Samuel story of Yahweh's reluctance, manifested in warnings to the Israelites of the dire consequences that would follow from a monarchical form of government, to shift the governmental structure to an earthly monarchy (1 Sam 8).²⁴

In the monarchical period following Israel's successful demand to be more like its neighbors, a special relationship between the divine King and the earthly king develops in Israel. God through Samuel selects Saul (1 Sam 9:17) and David (1 Sam 16:1) to rule Israel.²⁵ Solomon treats his unorthodox succession as due to God's action (1 Kgs 3:6). Several passages in Chronicles point to kings in the Davidic line occupying the throne of Yahweh's kingdom or as having

20. *Ibid.*, 44.

21. John Van Seters argues controversially that the unconditional promise of the land to the patriarchs is editorially much later than the conditional Deuteronomistic promises. *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), chap. 14.

22. See Mettinger, "YHWH Sabaoth," 130 n. 87. This view may be postexilic as well.

23. The fable in Judg 9 suggests that only thornbush-type individuals like Abimelech would aspire to be kings.

24. Ralph W. Klein notes that the absence of Deuteronomistic language and the polemical tone suggest that the writer, if exilic, uses an older source. *I Samuel* (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), 74. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 is more sanguine about kingship, perhaps reflecting a later period.

25. As with the judges (Judg 6:34; 11:29; 14:19), the spirit of the Lord comes upon Saul (1 Sam 10:10) and David (1 Sam 16:3), but the resulting rule moves from the periodic to the hereditary.

been appointed by Yahweh as king on Yahweh's throne (1 Chr 17:4; 29:23; 2 Chr 9:8). Yahweh "installs his king on Zion" (Ps 2:6), while the temple, to which the earthy ruler has access to make offerings (1 Kgs 8:52), is the center of the kingdom. The monarchical theme behind Gen 1 is compatible with both, in that it provides the basis for God's theocratic rule and for the establishment in his land of hereditary monarchies that rule his kingdom on his behalf.²⁶

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Understanding the land as a feature of the kingdom of God faces the difficulty that the phrase "kingdom of God (*'ēlōhim*)" does not occur in the OT, while the phrase "kingdom of Yahweh" occurs in various forms only 15 times, almost exclusively in Chronicles, Psalms, and Daniel. While some have seen this as reason to downplay the concept,²⁷ others argue that, although the precise words are absent, the concept of a kingdom ruled by God is an important background motif of the OT.²⁸ Perhaps the absence of the direct term places the emphasis rightly on the King rather than the kingdom.

The other disputed question concerns the extent of God's kingdom: is it merely over Israel, or is it more universal?²⁹ Even accounts of the political kingdom leave no doubt as to its universality. Although the postexilic Chronicler associates Israel's kingdom with God's kingdom, in that Solomon and the Davidic line occupy the

26. The OT conception of God's rule shares both similarities and divergences with respect to the surrounding cultures (I. Mendelsohn, "Authority and Law in Canaan-Israel," *Supplement to JAOS* 74/3 [1954]: 27; Frankfort, "Epilogue"). In Mesopotamian cultures, the temporal ruler stood in obeisance to the divine ruler, from whom he received the kingdom in trust. For example, the Sumerian King List begins, "When the kingship was lowered from heaven . . ." (Thorkild Jacobsen, ed., *The Sumerian King List* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939], 71). By an annual ritual the king of Babylon returned the kingdom to Marduk, who in turn reinvested the king with authority for the coming year. For the Egyptians, to whom the king himself was divine, "monarchical rule was coeval with the universe; the Creator had assumed kingship over his creation from the first" (Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 320, 15). Following the Fifth Dynasty, with the rise of priestly power, the pharaoh administered the kingdom not under his own divine auspices but under the mandate granted by the god Re (Wilson, *Culture . . .*, 88).

27. Dale Patrick, "The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament," in *The Kingdom of God in 20th Century Interpretation* (ed. Wendell Willis; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1987), 67.

28. The concept of the kingdom of God "had a long history and is, in one form or another, ubiquitous in both the Old Testament and New." John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953), 18.

29. "Predominantly in the pre-exilic period He is described as the King of Israel. . . . On the other hand, in the exilic and post-exilic period He is also described as king of the world." Gerhard von Rad, "βασιλεύς," *TDNT* 1.569.

throne of God's kingdom (1 Chr 17:14; 29:23), "neither text allows us to identify the kingdom of God with the kingdom of Israel, and the Old Testament never at any point makes such a naïve equation." Rather, "the Chronicler believed that the kingdom of God was made known through the Davidic dynasty."³⁰ Elsewhere, in a prayer ascribed to Jehoshaphat, the Chronicler sees God as ruling over all nations (2 Chr 20:6). Indeed, even beyond this the Chronicler asserts, in a prayer ascribed to David, that "everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Yahweh, is the kingdom. You are ruler of all things" (1 Chr 29:11, 12).

This broader reign also is envisioned in the Psalms. God rules not only over all nations (22:28) but "everywhere is his dominion" (103:22). According to Ps 2, since all nations are subject to his rule and power, he can allot them as he wills. Yahweh's power in setting up kings extends beyond the bounds of Israel. Second Isaiah records that the creator God "will raise up him (Cyrus) in my righteousness" (Isa 45:13).

Bringing together the thesis that the concept of suzerainty underlies Genesis, that this presupposes that Yahweh is king and that his kingdom is not merely local (although the local allocation is of great significance), the question now arises, how did "the earth [become] the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it"? By what right does Yahweh possess and allocate it? The Psalmist responds in the processional liturgy, "for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters" (Ps 24:1-2).³¹ Yahweh possesses kingdom rights by virtue of creating everything (Isa 37:16; 40:22).³² God's reign connects with the world firmly established (Ps 96:10). The works in his dominion are to praise him who has "established his throne in heaven; his kingdom rules over all" (Ps 103:19, 22).

30. Martin J. Selman, "The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament," *TynBul* 40 (1989): 166,167. Bright contends that, although shaped by the Davidic kingdom-state, the notion was not created by it (*The Kingdom of God*, 18).

31. Psalm 24 has three parts, connected possibly by the theme of celebration of divine kingship. The first part presents the divine cosmogony of the earth, while the latter part lauds Yahweh as military victor, not over chaos but, perhaps, if the psalm is a processional hymn for carrying the Ark, connected with battles relating to the Ark. Aubrey R. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet and Israel's Psalmody* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), 84-92. (For the view that connects the psalm with the Maccabean period and its battles, but not affecting our interpretation, see Marco Treves, "The Date of Psalm XXIV," *VT* 10 [1960]: 428-34.)

32. In Egypt, "pharaoh's rule was the Image of the rule of Re. But if Re had been the first king of Egypt, he had ruled by a right which none could claim after him. The universe was his because he had made it" (Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 150).

RIGHTFUL OWNERSHIP OF THE LAND

The land forms a central motif in the Pentateuch. Brueggemann contends that it is "a central, if not *the central theme* of biblical faith." Indeed, he continues, "preoccupation with existentialist decisions and transforming events has distracted us from seeing that this God is committed to this land and that his promise for his people is always his land."³³ Genesis 1 leads to narratives about land. Those who live in the land—Adam and Eve in Eden (3:23-24), Cain (4:16), Noah and his family, the inhabitants of Babel (11:9)—are expelled. Others are called from one land to another (Gen 12:1) and promised its possession (15:7-8), or conducted through wilderness wanderings toward a land that is theirs by covenant. Removal from, promises about, donations of (Deut 6:10-11), and covenants about the land make clear the need for ultimate justification for ownership.³⁴ Because the land is rightly his, God can allocate it however he wills (Lev 25:23-24). More specifically, God is within his rights to remove those already living on one portion of the land and give it to the people (Deut 4:37-38; Ps 115:15-16) with whom he makes a covenant. Not on their own merits (Deut 7:7-9) can people claim a portion of the land, but on the promise of the rightful owner, who only leases but never relinquishes the land. The land is rightly God's because God made it (Pss 89:11; 95). God created its structure and boundaries, filled its emptiness, named its contents, blessed it, and gave it its procreative imperative.

Von Rad distinguishes the historical conception of God's possession of the land from what he terms the cultic. The first relates to Yahweh's giving of Canaan to Israel. He notes that there is no mention in this case that God owns the land. Rather, God promised it to Abraham and his descendants and because of that historical commitment assists them in their conquest of the inhabitants to obtain it. The second relates to worship and the bringing of the tithes or first-fruits of the land to God. Yahweh is the landlord, so the best of the land's produce belongs and is to be given to God.³⁵

33. Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 3, 6.

34. "A certain elasticity was present even in the idea of 'land' itself, which could be interpreted both as a particular local region, and as the entire cosmos. This elasticity of meaning provided a way of making a conscious identification between an inhabited locality and the whole universe, so that the god who was worshipped in a particular area as the lord and giver of its life, was venerated at the same time as the creator of the universe" (Clements, *God and Temple*, 2-3).

35. Gerhard von Rad, "The Promised Land and Yahweh's Land in the Hexateuch," *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 87.

But the historical and the cultic, even if conceptually distinguishable, are complementary, not in competition.³⁶ Despite von Rad's contention that the land given to Israel is not referred to as "Yahweh's land," the song in Exod 15:13-18 speaks of the future planting of Israel in the land of God's allotment (*nahalah*), the place that God made for his dwelling, established by the God who reigns forever.³⁷ The celebratory song both extols Yahweh as the divine warrior / king and echoes creation. The divine monarch has created (not purchased or acquired) the mountain (Zion) that is his dwelling; it is rightfully his to give to the people he brought into this particular land "by the power of his arm."

ESTABLISHING THE KINGDOM

Since the concept of the land, understood not only geographically but politically and socially, is central to the OT, and since the concept of an absolute monarchy underlies God's covenantal allocation, and since God has the right to the land (his kingdom) by virtue of his creation of it, the creation account (Gen 1:1-2:3³⁸) can be properly understood as the narrative of God establishing his kingdom. Focus on the text's cosmogonic function masks the fact that it serves a larger purpose and structure: namely, that the text presents a theological-political narrative recounting how God initially establishes his kingdom and thereby justifies his kingly claim to possess and dispose of whatever is, and correspondingly, why the land rightfully belongs to Israel as Yahweh's people. The text, then, should also be read in the ideological light of establishing rights claims and political administration.

The first creation account is a carefully crafted narrative of an ordered series of acts by which God by royal decrees brings into being his territory and establishes all things with their proper function. The narrative begins with God's creation of "the heavens and the earth," by which phrase the author indicates that the entire universe is properly God's domain.³⁹ Further, the author emphasizes who it is that

36. Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 10; Clements, *God and Temple*, 54.

37. For discussion of *nahalah* as "allotment," see Habel, *The Land Is Mine*, 33-35.

38. Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 6 and Umberto Cassuto (*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 1 [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961]) argue that "This is the account of," which occurs ten times in Genesis, always begins but never ends a narrative, so that 2:3 rather than 2:4a closes the first narrative. Otto Eissfeldt (*The Old Testament: An Introduction* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965], 205), however, treats the ending of the story at 4a as being a unique case.

39. "Erets," *TDNT* 1.394.

creates the kingdom by his use of *barā'*, which elsewhere in the OT is used only with respect to divine activity. God alone does the kingdom building.

However, the initial state of the earth is *tōhû wābōhû*. This phrase is found only two other times in Scripture, and *bōhû* itself only occurs in combination with *tōhû*. In Isa 34:11 *tōhû wābōhû* describes the desolation of Edom following the Lord's vengeance. The meaning of v. 11 is clarified in v. 12. "her nobles will have nothing there to be called a kingdom; all her princes will vanish away." The kingdom of Edom will be empty, uninhabited. In Jer 4:23 the two words are conjoined in the same way as in Gen 1 to form a hendiadys that stresses the empty desolation of the earth. Again, the parallel clause strengthens the meaning as emptiness: as light is gone from the heavens, so the earth is empty. There are no people, no birds; the once fruitful land is a desert, the ruined town uninhabited (vv. 25-26). In short, after presenting in Gen 1:1 the basic framework of creation (the universe), the writer, employing the desert ecology with which he would be very familiar, describes this framework as desolate emptiness, devoid of content, a kingdom waiting to be filled.

Although some interpreters suggest otherwise, Gen 1:2 does not recount the need to establish a Greek-style cosmos from a primeval chaos that "signifies simply the threat to everything created."⁴⁰ Neither is there a reminiscence of an ancient battle, as found in the Mesopotamian creation story *Enuma Elish*.⁴¹ Rather, the writer simply but forcefully sets the stage for the subsequent filling of the vast but empty universe that the Creator has brought into being. Isaiah 45:18, which affirms that God did not create the earth to be *tōhû* but to be inhabited, confirms this understanding.

Parallel to the emptiness of the earth, darkness covers the deep waters. Just as heaven and earth form a pair in v. 1, earth and *tēhôm* ("deep") form a pair in v. 2.⁴² The mythology of the primeval ocean

40. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 51.

41. "The recovery of the Ugaritic texts has shown that the allusion to Yahweh's battle with Leviathan and the *tannîn*, but not Rahab, are derived from Canaanite Baal myths, and these show no signs of dependence on Mesopotamian sources." W. G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," *JTS* 16 (1965): 290.

42. "In Gen 1:2 *hār'āreš* and *tēhôm* are a 'hyponymous' word pair and hence the 'ocean' (*tēhôm*) is a part of the 'earth' (*hār'āreš*) since the term *hār'āreš*, which constitutes an antonymous word pair with *haššamayim* 'the heavens' in Gen 1:1, must refer to everything under the heaven. The cosmology in vv. 1-2 is bipartite, not tripartite." David Toshio Tsumura, "Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood," *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11* (ed. R. S. Hess and D. T. Tsumura; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 33.

goddess Tiamat neither lies behind nor is present in Genesis.⁴³ The deep does not oppose or resist God;⁴⁴ neither need it be seen as evil.⁴⁵ Indeed, the deep can be the source of blessing (Gen 49:25). It is possible that the editor of Genesis sees the deep as bracketing the Genesis narratives from chaps. 1 to 49, so that if in the latter instance the deep provides a positive blessing, the former is, if not positive, at least neutral. In any case, what is in view is the darkness and emptiness of what corresponded to the land: the sea. The kingdom was delimited when created but characterized by profound void—darkness and desolate emptiness—in all its aspects. It is God's not by right of conquest but by his creative acts.

The remainder of v. 2 confirms this understanding of the opening of Genesis. Verse 2 consists of three parallel clauses, the last of which stands in contrast to the first two. In spite of empty desolation and darkness, there is the anticipation of divine creative activity (1:2c). The Spirit or wind of God (*rûah 'ēlōhîm*) hovers or blows (*rāhap*) over the water. *Rāhap* appears in only one other place in the OT; in Deut 32:11 the eagle hovers over her young, protecting them in anticipation of their future. In this passage both *tōhû* and *rāhap* occur together: Yahweh found his people in the howling waste (*tōhû*—its parallel is "desert") and like an eagle protected them. Similarly in Gen 1, the Spirit or wind of God hovers or blows over the dark water as a sign of anticipation and promise of what is to come; among the barrenness and darkness there is a breath or wind of hope. This wind is not natural to the creation but derives from the Creator, who thereby reveals his intent to fill the void.⁴⁶

43. David Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation*, JSOT Sup 83; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 45-52. Even if they had a common root, "the two words do not denote the same thing. . . . Ti'āmat is a mythical personality. Such significance the Old Testament *tēhôm* never has. The complete lack of mythological associations appears with unmistakable clarity from Gen. 1:2. . . . If *tēhôm* were here treated as a mythological entity, the expression 'face' would have to be taken literally; but this would obviously lead to absurdity." Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1942), 99.

44. "The Torah, however, refrained from accepting any part of this tradition [of a Deep rebelling against God]. In the Pentateuch, *tēhôm* denotes simply the primeval World-Ocean—a purely physical concept." Cassuto, *Genesis*, 24.

45. "The concept of the personified Tiamat, the mythical antagonist of the creator god Marduk, is completely absent in the notion of *tēhôm* in the Hebrew creation account. In Gen. 1 *tēhôm* is clearly inanimate, a part of the cosmos, not the foe of God, but simply one section of the created world." G. F. Hasel, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *EvQ* 46 (1974): 83-84.

46. "It expresses Elohim's control over the cosmos and his ability to impose his will upon it." M. DeRoche, "The *rûah 'ēlōhîm* in Gen 1:2c: Creation or Chaos?" in *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie* (JSOT Sup 67; ed.

This approach contrasts sharply with those interpretations that see the opening of Genesis in a negative light. God is not battling a contrary, chaotic, monstrous force. Rather, God carefully fashions his kingdom, beginning with the structure that initially is empty but yet is pregnant with its future. The hovering Spirit signals not gloom but anticipation about what this kingdom will be like and whose it will be by filling.

By a series of subsequent divine utterances, the outline of the empty kingdom is filled in. The anticipatory divine breath or wind that hovered or blew over the waters now takes shape in the creative, active, divine word. Word forms the wind into a series of creative speech acts that populate the universe.

In the ancient Near East, to name is to exercise a sovereign right, showing that one either possesses the named or has power over it.⁴⁷ In particular, naming is a royal activity (2 Kgs 23:34; 24:17). By calling the light "day" and the darkness "night," God takes dominion over the temporal dimension of his kingdom. By naming the expanse "sky," God claims the upper reaches of his kingdom. He takes dominion over the lower reaches of his domain on the third day by naming the dry ground "land" and the gathered waters "seas." In effect, through the process of naming God establishes royal sovereignty over and ownership of what he has made: all space and time are his.

Thus, in the first three days God sets out the general structure of his kingdom—sky, earth, and seas (above, on, and below)—establishes his authority over time markers and the general contents of his kingdom by naming them, and sets the created for their respective functions. Though the fashioned kingdom stands over against the creating Monarch, it belongs to him: its origin lies in his royal commands. By his creative ordering God stakes his claim to the entire universe.

Yet it is the land that dominates attention, for in the land the kingdom will come to its fulfillment. The focus of the third and sixth days is the land. Even the creation of the celestial bodies on the fourth day looks to the land, for the celestial lights mark the festival seasons⁴⁸ and times and illumine the earth for human activities.

In sum, Gen 1:1-2:3 narrates the establishment of a great kingdom by the King of the earth. It is a cosmogonic account serving as

L. Eslinger and G. Taylor; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 318. Also Casuto, *Genesis*, 25.

47. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 53.

48. The same word is translated "appointments" in Lev 23. These are "the annual days when all Israel was to come to worship the God of the covenant and celebrate the covenantal relationship" (Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 30).

a theological-political assertion establishing rightful ownership of whatever is. Since God created everything, it is his. All fits into his dominion and purposes, and the King, as the ultimate arbiter of value, declares it is good.

ADMINISTERING THE KINGDOM

What remains is the creation of what is necessary to administer this vast kingdom. God's messengers travel throughout the kingdom but do not reside in it. At times God himself, as King, investigates the affairs reported to his courts (Gen 11, 18). But temporary journeys cannot provide an effective method of kingdom governance. The King needs permanent administrators to oversee on his behalf the kingdom's daily affairs.

Ancient Near Eastern monarchs, like others with wealth (Abraham, Gen 15:2; 24:1-2; Joseph, Gen 44:1), entrusted their households and property to their stewards so that they could attend to more significant matters.⁴⁹ God too entrusts his lands to stewards, but these he also has to create. In this way God's kingdom-creating acts move to their climax.⁵⁰

In creating humans the making is separated from the saying; the saying is the affirmation, the announcement of God's intent to make human beings in his image. This creation is unique in that the created bear the very image and likeness of the Monarch. Oriental kings placed statues of themselves in their territory, signifying their claim to that land and to obeisance.⁵¹ One of the most notable examples to date is the statue, recently uncovered near Tell Fekheriyeh (ancient Sikan), of Adad-it'i, who ruled in the ninth century in Guzan. The text on the statue, which uses cognates of the Hebrew words for "image" and "likeness," warns with curses against any who would remove and replace the king's name on the statue.⁵² Likewise,, God places those created in his image in the land to represent his interests. "Man is . . . God's sovereign emblem, . . . God's only representative . . . summoned to maintain and enforce God's claim to dominion over the earth."⁵³

49. In Egypt, "the delegated authority of even the highest officers in the state appears in some titles. The vizier is 'Steward of the Whole Land; 'Councilor of All Orders of the King'" (Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 53). In Mesopotamia the king was a shepherd of his people who had to "answer to the gods for the management of the affairs which they had entrusted to him" (Speiser, "Mesopotamia," 11).

50. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 57.

51. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 128.

52. A. R. Millard and P. Bordreuil, "A Statue from Syria with Assyrian and Aramaic Inscriptions," *BA* (Summer 1982): 135-41.

53. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis Interpretation* (Richmond: John Knox, 1982), 32.

In a subsequent narrative, this *'ādām*, like the day and night, sky, land, and sea, is named by the Creator (Gen 5:2). As the Creator possesses and dominates creation, so he is sovereign over humankind. Humans are not independent, on their own in the kingdom to pursue their own interests. Created and claimed by the Monarch, they owe him obeisance and worship.

Much debate surrounds discussion of the content of the *imago Dei*. Historically, diverse interpretations abound.⁵⁴ Yet understanding the *imago Dei* (*selem 'ēlōhîm*) in Gen 1 requires at least seeing it as connected with other concepts in the passage. The author presumes that the creation of humans is a unique event that establishes a close connection between the reality and its image. This connection is like what was presumed to hold between the king and his image or the god and the idol that functioned as its image. This is not to say that conceptions of idols lie behind the Genesis *imago Dei* description, but rather to suggest that underlying the culture in which it was formulated, was the belief that what bore someone's image could function as a representative in its stead.

Near Eastern thinking about images focuses more on their function than on their physical appearance.⁵⁵ The image of a deity does not mirror the god's real appearance, but rather by its function it symbolizes the deity's presence and primary activities or characteristics.⁵⁶ Similarly, the *selem 'ēlōhîm* in Gen 1 connects with the double-focused blessing-imperative that parallels the statement of image: to rule over created living things and to fill the earth.⁵⁷ The structure of vv. 26-28 brings out this double function as related to the image.

26 And God said: "Let us make man in our image, . . . and let them have dominion."

27 And God created man in his image, . . . male and female he created them.

28 And God blessed them and said, . . . "Be fruitful, multiply, fill, and subdue, and have dominion."

In v. 26 image connects with dominion over the earth and its creature; in v. 27 it connects with gender/sexuality. In v. 28 it connects with sexuality via reproduction (filling) and dominion. Hence, the

54. For a bibliography of recent discussion on the image of God, see Wenham *Genesis 1-15*, 26-27.

55. *Ibid.*, 30.

56. D. J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *TynBul* 19 (1968): 53-103.

57. "The two statements of v. 26 must be understood in conjunction; in P's construction they belong to a single thought complex. Nature or design in creation is related to function and status, or position." Phyllis A. Bird, "Male and Female He Created Them," *HTR* 74 (1981): 138.

image is intrinsically connected with the two divine blessing-imperatives of filling and ruling over. Both are needed in the new kingdom: the first because it is empty and needs populating; the second because order is necessary, requiring the careful administration of the non-human inhabitants of the kingdom on behalf of the King. These blessing-imperatives, flowing from the *imago Dei*, help specify the acts humans are to perform on God's behalf. They delineate the human exercise of stewardship.

That these blessing-imperatives contain a distinctly royal task is confirmed in Ps 8:6-8 (though the synonym *māšal* is used in place of *rādâ* ["to have dominion"]).

You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
 you put everything under his feet:
 all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field,
 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
 all that swim the paths of the seas.

At the same time, *rādâ* is generally limited to human rather than divine rule.⁵⁸ Humans exercise dominion over the creatures of the earth as a reflection of and on behalf of God's ultimate lordship.

Genesis portrays this dominion over the earth and its inhabitants by using powerful dominance terms. "Kabash is drawn from a Hebrew word meaning to tread down or bring into bondage, and conveys the image of a conqueror placing his foot on the neck of the conquered. . . . Radah comes from a word meaning to trample or to prevail against and conveys the image of one treading grapes in a winepress."⁵⁹ Thus, when commanded to subdue, "literally it implies trampling under one's feet, and it connotes absolute subjugation (cf. Jeremiah 34:11, 16; Zechariah 9:15; Nehemiah 5:5; 2 Chronicles 28:10)."⁶⁰ As the absolute monarch exercised absolute hegemony over his kingdom, so God endowed his stewards with similar power.⁶¹

In addition to these imperatives, God also gives his stewards authority. This is revealed most clearly in the second creation story, where God grants the man the prerogative to name the animals of God's creation, the very ones God brings to the man (2:19-20). Since naming, as we noted above, shows either ownership or power over something, the man's act of naming all the living creatures shows he

58. "*Rādâ* . . .," *TWOT*, 2.833.

59. Loren Wilkinson, *Earth Keeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 209.

60. Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 60.

61. That these commands/blessings are not to be understood as sanctioning ecological rape, see Jeremy Cohen, "*Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It*": *The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 12-19.

has taken dominion over them. At the same time, one should be careful about the true source of this power: it is delegated, not self-derived. The real owner brings the animals before the one who names. Yet God gives him a real charge of stewardship, not a nominal one, for the real owner of the animals accepts the names the steward assigns.⁶²

In sum, the *imago Dei* of Gen 1 "is rooted ultimately in the royal ideology of the ancient Near East."⁶³ Hence, it is best understood in this context in terms of the two parallel blessing-imperatives. Since filling and ruling are special prerogatives of the king (1 Kgs 3:4; Ps 110:2),⁶⁴ they can be appropriately assigned by the King to his representatives as tasks to be carried out on his behalf in administering his kingdom.⁶⁵

Westermann objects to this interpretation of the *imago Dei* on two grounds. First,

such an explanation of the image and likeness of God does not correspond to the overall understanding of the relationship of God and man in the Priestly writing. According to the Priestly tradition there can be a manifestation or proclamation or representation of God only in the context of the holy place or the holy event. God manifests himself in his glory (*kābôd*), but not in man.

62. Some care has to be taken with *selem 'ēlōhīm*. The concept of the image of God has been traced to other cultures. In Egypt, the pharaoh bore the image of God. Thus of the pharaoh it is said, "Thou art the living likeness of thy father Atum of Heliopolis (for) Authoritative Utterance is in thy mouth, Understanding is in thy heart, thy speech is the shrine of Truth (*maat*)" (Kubban Stella, II, 17-18 [in Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 149]). Tracing Babylonian roots is more tenuous, though a few passages identify the king as the image and hence representative of the god. In Akkadian, "in transferred uses the basic idea of a likeness is maintained, with emphasis on resemblance, correspondence, and representation, especially with respect to character and function" (Bird, "Male and Female He Created Them," 141). But although the Genesis account manifests a linguistic commonality with Egyptian, Neo-Assyrian, and Neo-Babylonian statements about the image of god, which establishes that the concept was present in the ancient Near East, and although the concept of functional representation is present in these traditions, it is doubtful that these should be taken simply as precursors of the biblical use. For one thing, such an expression in a context affirming the king's deity would be unacceptable to a Priestly author. For another, non-Israelite assertions lack the democratic element characteristic of the Genesis account, namely, that all—noble and commoner alike—bear the image. The Egyptian-Babylonian concept presupposes a kingly or monarchical setting, whereas in Gen 1 the *selem 'ēlōhīm* is not intrinsically royal, for those who bear the image are not kings but simply humans (Bird, *ibid.*, 140-42). Thus, though the concept of image of God was known and invoiced elsewhere on the royal level, the specific Genesis application differs from that found in the surrounding cultures.

63. H. Wildberger, "Das Abbild Gottes," *TZ*, 255; quoted in Westermann, *Genesis*, 38.

64. "It has been demonstrated that the expression (fill and subdue) has its origin in the court-style of Babylon and Egypt" (Westermann, *Creation*, 52).

65. The second creation story also develops the theme of stewardship; in it God appoints his stewards to work in and tend God's special garden, the pleasant place of

Second, the king can represent the divinity before the people, but "before whom or for whom does mankind represent God?"⁶⁶

We will deal with the first objection in a broader context below. With regard to the latter objection, the response is that humans represent God before the creation. As the steward acts on behalf of his master in his dominion over what has been assigned to him, so humankind's responsibility is to administer the kingdom on behalf of God for the benefit of other created beings, human beings, and ultimately God himself. Westermann correctly claims that humans were created so that "something may happen between him and God and that thereby his life may receive a meaning."⁶⁷ What he fails to see is that meaning arises from the service humankind renders both to God and to creation. Stewardly service is not servitude or slavery, after the manner of the Mesopotamian stories of the role the gods assigned to humans. Rather, stewardship is a position of honor and responsibility, of dignity to administer the good kingdom.

In sum, the Gen 1 account culminates in the creation of humans whose responsibility is to administer God's created kingdom. They are to act as God's stewards, standing in God's place, representing God's interests while being endowed with his image and derived authority. The charge to these stewards is to fill and rule over the created realm that once was empty but now teems with the good things that compose an ordered, economically viable kingdom.⁶⁸ Later covenants, in part, formalize this relationship.⁶⁹

God's walking (2:15). Stewards are to care for that over which they have dominion. Here we find a third assigned function, in which the Genesis narrator gives us, in part, essential ingredients to begin to construct the requisite ethic of ruling. Rape and pillage of the earth are not justified; no selfish abuse is sanctioned. Stewards are servants who, in being commanded to serve, benefit that over which they rule. Good kings bring prosperity to their people (Ps 72); good shepherds take care of, protect, strengthen, bind up, and recover the sheep (Ezek 34). "Stewardship is . . . dominion as service" (Wilkinson, *Earth Keeping*, 224). Although a model of the absolute monarch underlies the creation (and later) stories, more than the good of the monarch is in view. The good of the Landlord and of his lands and creatures is envisioned.

66. Westermann, *Creation*, 59.

67. *Ibid.*, 60.

68. For development of the resulting ethic, see Bruce R. Reichenbach and V. Elyng Anderson, *On Behalf of God: A Christian Ethic for Biology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

69. Elsewhere in the Pentateuch the reader can discern additional obligations of the stewards to their divine King. First, being a tenant of the king meant that military duties could be expected in exchange. Moses placed such an obligation on the Transjordanian tribes (Num 32:21-22). This has Near Eastern parallels. "The Mari kings are known to have censused their subjects with the purpose of acquiring soldiers and other servants for the crown, and . . . land grants were given in fief to these subjects in compensation for their services. Possession of such land obligated a person to service, and

NECESSITY FOR JUSTIFICATION

One final question: why did the writers deem it necessary to provide a justification for the distribution of the land? Here we return to Habel's advocacy of treating texts as, in part, political documents. Habel suggests Deuteronomy portrays Yahweh as a universal monarch

who controls vast domains, of which Canaan happens to be one. . . . is YHWH is viewed as a relatively unknown deity on the ancient Near Eastern scene, this claim is not widely recognized among other nations and is only in the process of being revealed fully to Israel. . . . The allocation of a piece of YHWH's universal domain to Israel and the establishment of Israel as a people in that land are crucial steps in the public demonstration of YHWH's sovereignty over all lands. In Deuteronomy, the text presents YHWH as a deity seeking to prove these claims to universal dominion.⁷⁰

Applying this reading to the Gen 1 text, one may surmise that Israel needed to justify perhaps to both themselves and others that the land belonged rightly to them and not to the Canaanites whom they were dispossessing, or, where the audience is taken to be later, not to the competing postexilic inhabitants (Ezek 9:1). Since God is the creator of the universe and all the land, it is rightfully his to give to his promised / conquering / returning people.

the census was renewed periodically to insure that such land was in the hands of those who were capable of rendering the required services" (S. Herbert Bess, *Systems of Land Tenure in Ancient Israel* [Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1963], 111. Quote in Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 72-73). A second obligation of stewards was to establish justice. This activity applied to the common person. Abraham was to do what was just and right (Gen 18:19) and, interestingly enough, expected the same of his God (v. 25). This likewise has parallels. "The big problem in Babylonian thought was that of justice. If the great gods in council controlled the universe, and if they ruled it in justice, why . . . ? All kinds of very real difficulties had to be faced, and the position must have been worsened by the growth of law codes" (W G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960], 10). During the monarchical period the establishment of justice applied especially to rulers (see Habel, *This Land Is Mine*, 28-32). In what are termed David's last words, David saw the establishment of justice as an essential part of a kingship that ruled in "the fear of God" (2 Sam 23:3). This echoes the Prologue to the Code of Hammurabi: 'At that time Anuns and Enlil named me to promote the welfare of the people, me, Hammurabi, the devout, God-fearing prince, to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil, that the strong might not oppress the weak. . . . Hammurabi, the shepherd, called by Enlil, am I' ("The Code of Hammurabi," *ANET* 164). "I, Lipit-Ishtar, the humble shepherd of Nippur, the stalwart farmer of Ur, who abandons not Eridu, the suitable lord of Erech, . . . established justice in Sumer and Akkad in accordance with the word of Enlil" ("Lipit-Ishtar Lawcode" *ANET*, 159). The shepherd king, steward of his people, is answerable to the gods for preserving and dispensing justice.

70. Habel, *This Land Is Mine*, 37.

OBJECTION AND REPLY

It is time to return to the objection raised by Westermann to the functional interpretation of the *imago Dei*, namely, that viewing humans as God's representatives is inconsistent with a Priestly view of God. We broaden Westermann's concern regarding this Priestly perspective to construct a source criticism objection to our entire enterprise. Genesis 1:1-2:3 is held to be written by a Priestly writer during the Exilic or postexilic period, whereas almost all the Pentateuchal passages we cited are from non-Priestly sources.⁷¹ But, the objection continues, in this postmonarchical context, it is inappropriate to expect the Priestly author to adopt the view of God's rule and kingdom that we have delineated. Israel has come through a long, monarchical period where the king, as God's anointed, administered the land and its people and where the transcendent God's locus of activity was the Temple. Israel is embarking on a period where priestly leadership will focus on the Law. God is not immanent everywhere, seen walking though the kingdom conversing with humans, but manifests himself primarily through the priestly and prophetic offices. Hence, our analysis of Gen 1 is invalid because it conflates the two very distinguishable traditions J and P.

One might construct a number of responses to this objection. First, the motif on which we have focused, namely, the connection among God's creating, his resultant just possession of what he created, and his prerogative to allot portions of the land to whomever he chooses, is echoed in Pss 89, 95, and 115, which are taken to be Exilic or postexilic Psalms. Psalm 89 even invokes the motif of a council of the holy ones and the metaphor of God's arm and hand. The view of God and creation that we have delineated, then, is not inappropriate to the postexilic Priestly milieu.

It may be replied that the features noted indicate that these psalms contain older material.⁷² Mowinckel suggested that, since they were connected with or derived from preexilic Israelite royal enthronement ceremonies, they contain older parts added to by the postexilic community. Some think that Ps 89, for example, contains an older hymn in vv. 2-3 and 6-19 on the power of Yahweh.⁷³ Even

71. See the listing of P in D. C. Simpson, *Pentateuchal Criticism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), 70-71.

72. These so-called enthronement psalms, which connect ruling, possession, and creation, may have been derived from enthronement ceremonies present in preexilic Israel; some suggest that Ps 95, for example, may be traceable back to premonarchical years of tribal settlement of Palestine (Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet and Israel's Psalmody*, 19).

73. See Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1990), 414.

so—and there are others who hold to their postexilic provenance—their postexilic use may suggest at least a token acceptance of such motifs during this period.

Second, it is generally held that, though the Priestly account is finalized during the time of Ezra, it is based on older material. This is especially true of the Genesis stories. Westermann himself writes that "the Genesis account is closely related to the pre-history of the Creation stories outside Israel."⁷⁴ Lambert argues that, with the parallels that exist between Gen 1-11 and the Mesopotamian creation literature, one must ask when Israel likely would have been positioned best to make this connection. One possibility is that the Jews were exposed to the Babylonian myths during their exile in the sixth century, when they responded by creating their own version. But, Lambert argues, it is unlikely that the Jews would have adopted aspects of Babylonian mythology during the exile, given the relatively short time span and the opposition of the Jewish leaders to syncretism.⁷⁵ Moreover, the Genesis account may also function as a polemic against Mesopotamian mythological/religious ideas.⁷⁶ As noted previously, whereas in the latter, humans are portrayed as menials to serve the gods, in Genesis they are God's representatives, bearing his image. Whereas in Babylonian mythology the heavenly luminaries are gods, in Gen 1 they are lights set in the sky to demarcate the times and seasons (though still with a religious function). Hence for Lambert the material in Gen 1 and 5-11 calls for an earlier date, perhaps before the invasion of the Sea Peoples from the west and the Arameans from the east in the twelfth century. He suggests that Gen 1 existed in some form during the latter part of the second millennium,⁷⁷ during which time the motif of an oriental monarch would have been widespread. Whether or not Lambert is correct, his suggestion at least opens the possibility that, although Westermann may be correct about Priestly theology, the sources for Gen 1 may be older and hence at the very least compatible with a differing conception of God.

Finally, and relevant to our thesis, in attending to sources, one must not overlook the integrity of the completed project and its theology.⁷⁸ Genesis at some point became a literary unit not merely redacted

74. Westermann, *Creation*, 41.

75. W. G. Lambert, "Babylonien and Israel," *TRE* 5.67-79.

76. Hasel, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," 81-102.

77. Lambert, "A New Look," 300.

78. "The starting point should be the completed literary entities, i.e., the OT itself and its parts. From them one can work backwards and ask questions about the redaction and the literary sources used by them. . . . From the relatively certain one can work back to the relatively uncertain" (R. Smend, *Entstehung*, 11; quoted in Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, xxxvi).

from sources but created with a discernible structure by its author around particular themes. Although it may reflect the themes of its sources, it also weaves its own theme. So the interesting question is why the final editor chose to introduce the largely J document⁷⁹ with the P creation story? As we have noted, recent interpreters stress the centrality of the land and its promise in Genesis. Given this dominant theme, one may argue that the creation account was appended to advance this theme. Our contention is that it does this by providing a theological-political narrative justifying God's possession of the land in the first place and his right to allocate it as he wishes. Although this may not have been the original intent of the P source, the editor appropriated its cosmogony to this end, so that it is made to serve the larger Genesis (and Pentateuchal) land ideology.

Hence, although Westermann may be correct regarding how P may interpret the image of God motif or the priestly or prophetic manifestation of Yahweh, the in situ literary setting of the creation story as introducing a series of removals, then the promise, occupation, and later allotment of the land to Abraham and his descendants provides the context for interpreting the story and its significance. In short, whether P's treatment in Gen 1 is based on much older material or is of postexilic theological construction, it is quite appropriate to interpret the Genesis narrative from the perspective of a writer justifying possession of a land that was allotted to Israel by a powerful monarch who established his kingdom by creation and thereby justifies his claim to whatever exists in it.

CONCLUSION

Viewing the creation account in its theological-political motif of establishing the kingdom and justifying rightful ownership frees the interpreter from many long and fruitless debates. We need not worry about whether the length of the days and nights was 24 hours or long eons, for their point in situ is to mark divisions within kingdom-building, not temporally-discrete cosmogonic divisions. We need not debate gaps between vv. 1 and 2 so as to accord with the geological calendar or seek to comprehend chaotic conditions that need rectification. We need not worry about light existing without solar objects or plants without pollinators. As the celebrated Jewish commentator Rashi noted centuries ago in his commentary on Genesis, the purpose of Gen 1 was not to establish a chronology. Rather, what Gen 1:1-2:3 gives is an orderly account of kingdom establishment from a theological-political perspective.

79. Following Van Seters with respect to E (*Prologue*, 4, 328).

At the same time, Gen 1 is more than a piece of existentialist mythology. It puts us in position to prepare for two central motifs of the Pentateuch: the promise of a specific portion of the land to Abraham and his descendants and the preparation for its taking and administration. Both events are justified as kingdom events, for the Monarch can settle people in his kingdom wherever he wishes, even if it means transposing populations (2 Kgs 17:24-25). Conquest is the means of Israel's occupation, not its ultimate justification. Israel's continued residence depends on continued allegiance and obedience to the King whose land it is. Rebellion or acknowledgment of competing monarchs can lead to removal from the subjects' homeland and either being resettled or destroyed (2 Kgs 17:22-23; 24:10-17; 25:1-12), as prefigured in the stories in Gen 3-11.

Thus, the creation account prepares for the subsequent narratives about the land. At the outset God creates the universal kingdom, thereby establishing his right to it, and fills it both with ordinary contents and with humans whom, as stewards, he has charged to fill, rule over, and care for it. The universalist account quickly narrows to particularist concerns with a specific people and land area, so that at the end God renews his intention to give a specific portion of the land to the family of Abraham, to whom he promised it on oath (Deut 34:4). Israel has the right to the land because God promised it to them, and God can so apportion it because the land ultimately is his by virtue of his creation.