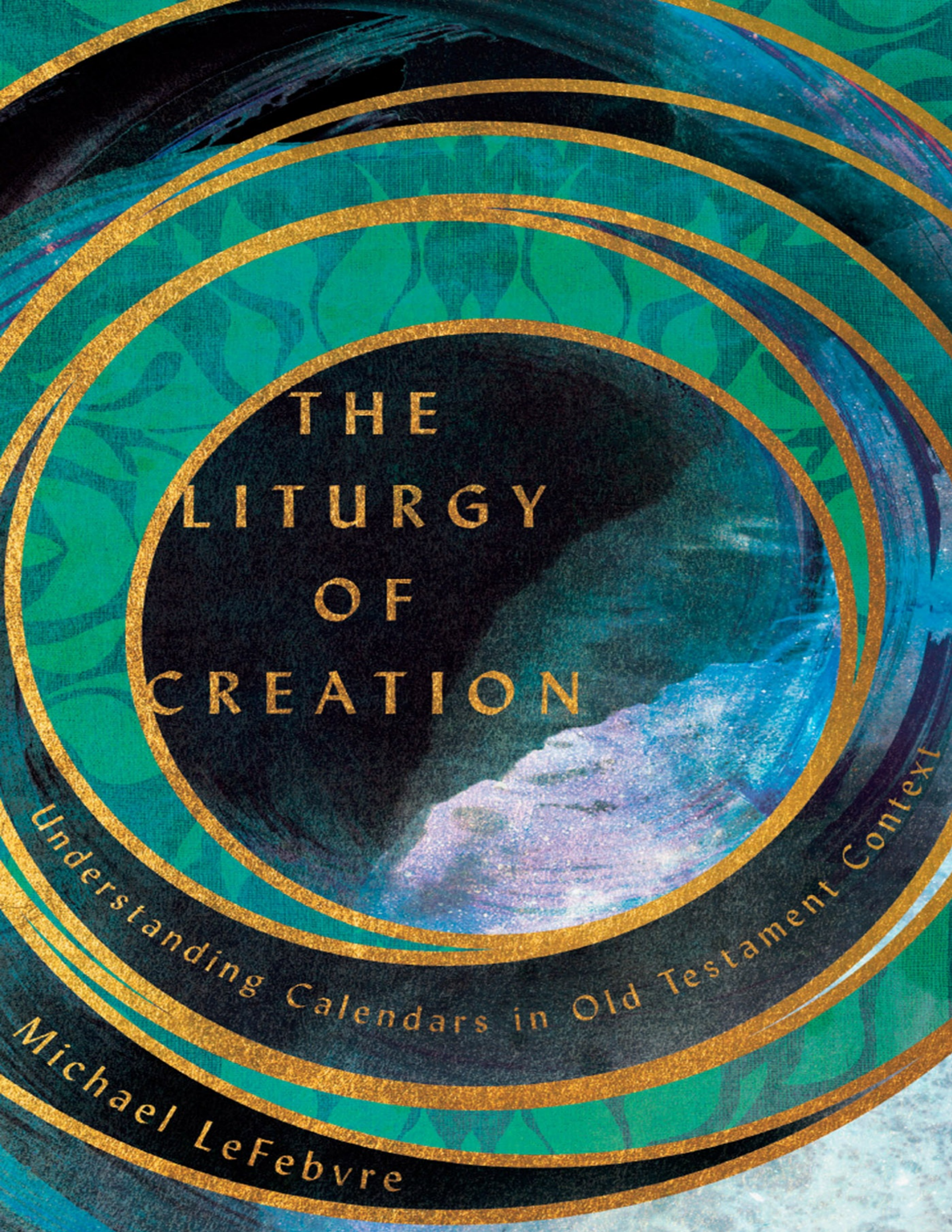

THE LITURGY OF CREATION
Understanding Calendars in Old Testament Context
Michael LeFebvre

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Foreword by C. John Collins

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Dedicated to the memory of

David A. Neel

(1957–2014)

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work. . . . For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.

EXODUS 20:8-11

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FOREWORD

C. JOHN COLLINS

WHAT? ANOTHER BOOK ON THE CREATION STORY? Why can't the scholars just let us read it for ourselves? Haven't these scholars already said enough? Is there anything more to be said?

If that's your response, you have my sympathy. Not everyone who has spoken or written an opinion deserves our attention. But with this book, Dr. Michael LeFebvre shows that he *is* one that we should listen to, that he belongs in this conversation, that his voice is an edifying one.

Dsr. LeFebvre and I have never met face-to-face; we have corresponded by email over the past couple of years and offered one another comments and encouragements. He was in a program with the Center for Pastor Theologians, and I had just given a talk to another group in a similar program with the Center. I was strongly impressed with the quality of the young scholar-pastors that I met, and I have been likewise impressed with the academic depth and pastoral wisdom I have seen in Dr. LeFebvre. It is my pleasure to commend this book to your study.

All serious study of the Genesis creation account should begin with what that account does for the *Israelite* audience of the whole of Genesis, and of the whole of the Torah. Dr. LeFebvre has done this creatively, with a study of how the Torah uses its calendar references, connecting key events in Israel's history

to dates in the liturgical calendar; in this he finds patterns that he can apply to the creation account—which, as we know, comes to us in the form of a calendar week.

You will find it worth your time to read this book for these first six chapters on the liturgical calendar. If you stop there, you will have gained a great deal of insight into the life-setting of ancient Israel, the function of the festivals and their relation to the agricultural calendar, and the literary style of the Mosaic narration. (Even having studied these topics a bit myself and written on some of them, I found much to learn and to think about.) But, if I might offer some advice, don't stop there! Go on to read the following chapters, which give a detailed look at the calendar-like style of Genesis 1:1–2:3. (Again, having studied and written about *that,* I found plenty to think about here.)

Dr. LeFebvre has accomplished something remarkable: he has written something that is academically responsible and creative and is at the same time readable and clear for the intelligent layperson. I might add that his overall case is attractive, enriching the conversation. Like any ambitious contribution, his particular arguments will be sifted, reviewed, appropriated, criticized; some of them might need revision, and some of them (or *many* of them) might change people's minds! But that's how it should be, and hardly detracts from the viability of his basic proposal. He has connected his own views to a version of the framework reading of the creation account; and in so doing, he has improved that reading and overcome some of the difficulties that others have found with it. All of this he has firmly based on textual evidence from the Bible itself.

Dr. LeFebvre argues that associating biblical events with festival dates does not assert the actual chronology of these events. He has also made it clear that this in no way undercuts the reality of these events themselves—and the same is true of the creation story. I earnestly hope all readers will catch *both sides* of that!

The final chapter does a fine job of putting a practical point on all this: he encourages us to use the creation story according to its proper purpose, especially as we observe the weekly rhythm of work and rest. That account has a limited use in Bible-science debates—whether from the perspective of faith, or

that of unbelief; that's not what it's there to do. Dr. LeFebvre affirms, as I do, the traditional Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*; and far from being threatened by the scientific study of the world, and even of human beings, properly understood, this doctrine happily makes a place for these studies. There is plenty more to say on this, of course, but this book has pointed the way to wisdom in handling these matters.

That's enough from me; now it's time to read this book. You will discover that you are in the company of a competent and friendly guide, one for whom you can be thankful to God.

PREFACE

THIS BOOK GREW OUT OF A LONG-STANDING interest in Old Testament law. My initial work in the field focused on the so-called civil or judicial laws.[1] But more recently my interest has turned to the Torah's ritual laws,[2] including Israel's festival calendars as reflected in this volume. The festival calendars of Israel might seem an obscure focus for study, but one Old Testament calendar is of earnest interest among Christians at all levels. From the pew to the pulpit and the professor's lectern, few topics share the importance ascribed to the creation week calendar in Genesis 1:1–2:3.

The meaning of the creation week continues to be one of the most controversial issues in the church today. But many arguments about the text approach the creation week as a historical narrative or as biblical poetry. As I pursued my study of Israel's festival calendars, it gradually became clear that the creation week might best be explained in comparison with the Pentateuch's other calendar narratives. Thus, the volume in your hands began to take shape.

While this is a work of biblical scholarship, my motivation to write emerges from my role as a pastor. My primary calling is to minister in a Brownsburg, Indiana, congregation called Christ Church Reformed Presbyterian. It is my calling in the church that has shaped my concern for the pastoral implications of the creation week calendar. I am thankful for the support of my elders and for the congregation that has provided the community in which I have been able to preach and to study, allowing me to develop many of the insights compiled into

this project. I owe a debt of gratitude to my church family. Nevertheless, my arguments in these pages should not be construed as representative of the views of my church or my denomination.[3] The views in this book are my own. However, I could never have developed this project without my ecclesial context and the significant assistance I have gained through the work of others.

I am grateful for the encouragements I received as a young seminarian, relative to these topics, from a few short but important conversations with the late James Montgomery Boice. I am also thankful for patient email interaction during my postgraduate years with Ken Van Dellen and Mark Roberts with the Affiliation of Christian Geologists. I have also benefited from the counsel of several scientists and churchmen who kindly reviewed early drafts of this book and have offered their constructive feedback, including Scott McCullough, Kenneth Turner, John Walton, C. John Collins, Tremper Longman III, Richard Holdeman, Gregory Enas, Andrew Knapp, Michael Murray, Matthew Mason, Nathan Shaver, and my colleagues in the St. John Fellowship of the Center for Pastor Theologians.[4]

My most faithful supporter in every aspect of my ministry, including my writing, has been my wife, Heather. She has been an encourager as well as an important partner in study. I am thankful for her insight and thoughtfulness as we discussed the issues and concepts represented in these pages—wrestling through their implications for our growing faith as individuals, as parents, and as members of the church. I am deeply thankful for a wife who is a true spiritual and intellectual partner as well as a beloved friend and companion. Our five children—Rachel, Andrew, James, David, and Laura—are a great joy to us, and I am grateful for their encouragement in my work and for their age-appropriate help with everything from conversation about book-related issues to companionship on library runs. My oldest daughter, Rachel, deserves particular mention as a valued discussion partner in this project.

“Geeking out” together with Rachel around books and conferences was both fun and important. Her perspective as a (then) high schooler was invaluable. She even distilled her own summary of the “calendar narrative” approach to the creation week into her Senior Worldviews presentation at Covenant Christian

High School in Indianapolis. Watching her give her presentation, and listening to the comprehension of her classmates in the question-and-answer part of the presentation, was an important proving point for this book's thesis: whether it would translate for that most discerning of audiences, high school teenagers! Thank you, Rachel, for your teamwork!

I also want to acknowledge the John Templeton Foundation for a grant provided in conjunction with the Center for Pastor Theologians. That investment helped to facilitate the final compilation of this research into a single volume. The numerous footnotes throughout this book testify to many others for whom I am further indebted. It is one of the great privileges of the present day that we have such ready access to knowledge. I pray I will be a faithful participant in the stewardship of these privileges.

There is one man I want to acknowledge particularly—a very special friend to whose memory I want to dedicate this volume. I am especially grateful for the fellowship, encouragement, and wisdom of David A. Neel (1957–2014). Dave was a chemist, a member of my congregation, a deacon in the church, and an avid and insightful student of all things faith and science. Dave spent many hours with me over the years discussing faith and science issues, and he was always generous with his wise insights and with articles and other resources that he shared with me. It was our intention—Dave and me—to write a book together some day on faith and science issues. But in 2013 Dave was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. On March 7, 2014, the Lord took Dave to his eternal sabbath rest. It was too soon. The ways of God are faithful but sometimes painful.

In frequent conversations with Dave during those final months together, I reminded him of our unfulfilled desire to cowrite a book on faith and science issues. By that time, my study in Old Testament calendars was beginning to crystallize around the conclusions captured in this volume. I told Dave what I was contemplating and that I would dedicate the resulting volume to his friendship when I finished it. The Lord took Dave just a short time later. This volume is my fulfillment of that commitment, and it is dedicated to his friendship.

While there are many to whom I owe gratitude, the ways in which I have drawn on others' support and input is my own responsibility. No one I have mentioned should be presumed to agree with the particular arguments I have advanced in this book. But I am deeply thankful for the joy of studying God's Word in fellowship with such a cloud of witnesses. I pray that the Lord will be pleased to add his blessing to this offering of my gratitude for his creation and re-creation so beautifully applied to our faith in the biblical calendars and the hope of the sabbath.

May King Jesus, the Creator of the World and the Redeemer of his church, be glorified!

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ANF	*Ante-Nicene Fathers*
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AUSS	*Andrews University Seminary Studies*
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BBET	*Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie*
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
BET	*Bringing Everyone Together*
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BR	*Biblical Research*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CTJ	*Canadian Journal of Theology*
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*

HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IJFM	*International Journal of Frontier Missiology*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBQ	*Jewish Bible Quarterly*
JBS	Jerusalem Biblical Studies
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
KTB	Knowing the Bible
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.* Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997
OEAE	*The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt.* Edited by Donald Redford. 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001
OEBL	*Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law.* Edited by Brent Strawn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015
Or	*Orientalia (NS)*
OTL	Old Testament Library
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PNTC	Pelican New Testament Commentaries
RA	*Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study

RPTJ	*Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal*
RSO	*Rivista degli studi orientali*
RTB	*Reasons to Believe*
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SWBAS	The Social World of Biblical Antiquity Series
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TWOT	*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* Edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
VE	*Vox Evangelica*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
WZKM	*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

Introduction

DATES, STORIES, AND CALENDARS

THE SUN HAD JUST CRESTED THE HORIZON as a band of officials and attendants led their prisoner to the palace. They had pronounced his judgment the night before, but only the Roman governor could approve an execution. As the colors of dawn painted the eastern sky, Jesus was taken to the court of Pontius Pilate.

The Gospel of Mark is particularly detailed about the timing of the events on that momentous day. Mark reports that Jesus had eaten the Passover meal with his disciples the night before (Mk 14:12; cf. Mt 26:17; Lk 22:7) and that he was arrested during an overnight prayer vigil in Gethsemane. "As soon as it was morning," the religious leaders "bound Jesus and led him away . . . to Pilate" (Mk 15:1; cf. Mt 27:1; Lk 22:66-23:1; Jn 18:28).

According to Mark, that trial did not take long. By "the third hour" of the day, "they crucified him" (Mk 15:25). The third hour after sunrise would be about nine o'clock in the morning by modern reckoning.[1] Once on the cross, Jesus was left to suffer for most of the remaining daylight hours. But halfway through that torment, around "the sixth hour" after sunrise (meaning about noon), "there was darkness over the whole land" (Mk 15:33; cf. Mt 27:45; Lk 23:44), which continued "until the ninth hour" (roughly three o'clock; Mk 15:33). During that period, when daylight ought to be at its peak, the sky had

lost its light. Then, “at the ninth hour” after sunrise, Jesus “uttered a loud cry and breathed his last” (Mk 15:34-37; cf. Mt 27:46).

The evening sun was sinking over the western horizon, painting the sky once more, this time in the colors of dusk, as the body of Jesus was removed from the cross. “When evening had come”—that is, when the sun was setting—“[they] laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock” (Mk 15:42-47; cf. Mt 27:57).

Mark’s record provides more chronological detail than the other Synoptics,[2] but the timing preserved by Matthew and Luke matches that of Mark. All three Synoptics identify the Last Supper as a Passover meal on Passover night, and all three date the crucifixion to the morning after the Passover meal. John, however, tells the same events with a different chronology that adds significant insight into the meaning of Christ’s death—and that introduces something fascinating about calendars in the Bible.

First of all, John says that Jesus held his Last Supper with the disciples on the day “before the Feast of Passover” (Jn 13:1), not on Passover night as indicated by the Synoptics. John repeats this point—that the Passover is still ahead—when he describes Jesus’ trial. According to John, the religious rulers led Jesus to Pilate, but “they themselves did not enter the governor’s headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover” (Jn 18:28). Thus, John’s Gospel presents the crucifixion as taking place *before* the Passover meal, while the Synoptics report that the crucifixion occurred on the day *after* the Passover meal. A second chronological detail reported differently in John is the time of day Jesus was nailed to the cross. Unlike the morning crucifixion reported by Mark (“the third hour,” Mk 15:25), John places Jesus on the cross at noon (“the sixth hour,” Jn 19:14).

Under the conventions of modern historical narrative, these differences in date and time seem “contradictory,” as though someone got their facts wrong. Many attempts have been made to “reconcile” the chronology of the Synoptics and that of John.[3] However, the best explanation is found not by resolving or smoothing over these differences but by listening to them. These crucifixion accounts were not so poorly compiled as to overlook such obvious timing

differences. These divergent timelines give a harmonious witness that Jesus is our Passover Lamb, but they do so by differently aligning the crucifixion events with their shadows in the Jewish Passover rituals.

Notably, the Synoptics, which describe the Last Supper as a Passover meal, also describe that meal as the setting for the Eucharist (Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:15-20). John has many other things to say about Jesus' final meal with his disciples, but he does not include the Eucharist in his description. The Synoptics align Jesus' Last Supper with the Passover meal because it is this meal and its message of peace with God through sacrifice that provides the basis for the New Testament Communion table. In the Eucharist, Christians celebrate our peace with God through the final Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7-8). The crucifixion timeline in the Synoptic Gospels shows us that Jesus is the Passover Lamb by aligning the Communion table with the Passover meal.

John also shows us that Jesus is our Passover Lamb, but he does so by a different alignment of events. In John's narrative, the Last Supper takes place on the night "before the Feast of Passover" (Jn 13:1), and he says nothing about the institution of the Eucharist at that dinner. Instead, John dates the crucifixion to the afternoon *before* the Passover meal, at the time when the people were bringing their lambs for slaughter. "Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover," John writes, "It was about the sixth hour. . . . So [Pilate] delivered him over to them to be crucified" (Jn 19:14-16). The "day of Preparation of the Passover" refers to the daylight hours when preparations were being made for the Passover meal that night.[4] John shows that Jesus is our Passover Lamb by aligning his crucifixion with the time when lambs were being gathered for the festival slaughter. Thus, all four Gospel authors relate the timing of the crucifixion to Passover, but they do so using different chronological scenarios.

These details teach us about the nature of Christ's crucifixion. They also open a window into a different world of calendars than our own. The Gospel writers introduce Passover into their narratives almost like one of the characters of the story, whose point of coming and going can be interpreted differently depending on the narrated perspective taken on the event.[5] A modern historian would not have that latitude, because we view calendars (and time) differently in

the present day. A contemporary historian would treat a festival date like Passover as a fixed, immovable part of the story's framework.

For comparison, a historian of American independence would be expected to identify Tuesday, July 2, 1776, as the date Congress declared independence from Great Britain. Even though Americans celebrate Independence Day on the Fourth of July each year, an accurate historian would report that independence was enacted two days prior. (July 4th was not the date of American independence but the date when that previously adopted *Declaration of Independence* was finally signed and published.) But a historian operating by ancient conventions might ascribe the independence event to its celebration date (July 4) without violating the integrity of his report by doing so. The Gospel crucifixion narratives illustrate this ancient way of using dates in historical narratives. John ascribes the crucifixion of Jesus to Passover afternoon, while the Synoptics date the same event to the day after Passover.

Granting an author latitude in how he or she represents chronology grates on our modern notions of a trustworthy report. In fact, an entire genre in biblical studies called Gospel harmonies attempts to resolve such chronological (and other) differences between the Gospels.[6] A "Gospel harmony" may help assuage one's discomfort with those differences that, if found in a modern work of history, would be problematic. But those "harmonies" come at a cost. It is often necessary to strain the narratives or to add extra assumptions into them in order to bring them into greater "agreement." "O that most excellent Harmony," Gotthold Ephraim Lessing wrote, "which can only reconcile two contradictory reports, both stemming from the evangelists, by inventing a third report, not a syllable of which is to be found in any individual evangelist!"[7]

Harmonization efforts have generally been regarded as unpersuasive. We should not base the trustworthiness of the Gospels on our ability to harmonize, for example, their different chronologies for the crucifixion. It is better to face the differences and consider why the authors used their descriptive latitude to record events as they did.[8] The journalistic way we expect timestamps to function today is not a reliable standard by which to assess timestamps in the Bible. Furthermore, imposing anachronistic expectations about calendars could

hinder our full appreciation of a biblical author's reason for drawing out particular date alignments.

In this book, I want to look at a series of dated events from throughout the Pentateuch before focusing on the seven dated creation events in Genesis 1:1–2:3. How to understand the days in the Genesis creation week is vigorously debated. Some scholars insist that the creation week is poetry and ought to be read according to the expectations of this genre.[9] Others insist that it is a historical narrative and ought to be read as a straightforward report of "what happened."[10] Still others insist it is an ancient Near Eastern myth and that it ought to be read through the lens of other ancient Near Eastern creation myths.[11] But surprisingly, very little if any attention has been given to the potential of reading the creation week as a *calendar*. Yet its role as a calendar is what the fourth commandment teaches us to draw from it: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy . . . For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day" (Ex 20:8-11).

I want to propose in this book that the Genesis 1:1–2:3 creation week is most fruitfully read as a "calendar narrative." It is a special kind of historical narrative in which historical events are given the dates of a festival observance (sabbath observance in the case of the creation week), without regard for the timing of the original occurrence. To establish this argument, it will be important to examine how the Pentateuch as a whole uses dates in other calendar narratives. I will seek to demonstrate the presence of a Torah-wide use of dates in narratives for their liturgical guidance in this special type of use we might call a "calendar narrative."

The first three chapters (part one) will lay groundwork regarding the calendar of Old Testament Israel: how it was organized, why it had the arrangement it did, and why the festivals were timed at their particular points in the year. Building on that groundwork, part two (chapters four through six) will look at the narratives in the Pentateuch associated with the various festivals of Israel's calendar. That is where the "engine" of my argument will be unpacked as we come to grips with the way the Pentateuch presents its calendar narratives

with assigned dates that guide Israel's festival observances rather than retaining the timing of those events' original occurrence.

In part three (chapters seven through eleven), I will apply the lessons of this study to the creation week narrative in Genesis 1:1–2:3. In this part of the book I argue that the creation week narrative is, transparently, not a chronological account of the original creation event. Instead, it is a structured retelling of the creation around the pattern of a Model Farmer tending his fields and livestock each day of the week until the sabbath. This form was to serve as a practical guide for the lay Israelite in his or her weekly labors and sabbath worship, and it does not even attempt to answer the curiosities of modern science regarding the processes or timing of the original creation event. My conclusions regarding the creation week generally fall into line with a "framework view" of the text, but with rigorous attention to the legal drafting techniques that exegetically demonstrate that conclusion. In the final chapter of this book (chapter twelve), I will draw some implications from this study, particularly regarding the relationship of faith and science.

My desire is to promote the creation week as a rich and practical guide for the weekly labors and worship of God's people, and I hope to urge Christians to "pull back" from its frequent misuse in scientific, anti-scientific, and pseudo-scientific polemics. I want to show in this book that the creation week was designed as a guide for faithful work and sabbath worship, and that we rob the text of its intended force when we instead deploy it in disputes about physics, cosmology, and natural history. This, I believe, is how the fourth commandment teaches us to uphold the creation week calendar.

By the way (returning to the crucifixion narrative), even though Jesus died on the afternoon before or after the Passover meal, he rose again on the third day! And the Gospels are careful to give us a date for the resurrection just as they were in relating the crucifixion to Passover. Their testimony concerning the date of his resurrection is unanimous: "On the first day of the week, at early dawn, . . . they found the stone rolled away from the tomb" (Lk 24:1-2; cf. Mt 28:1; Mk 16:2; Jn 20:1).

The Gospel writers used the Passover date to align Christ's sacrifice with the fulfillment of the old covenant festival of Passover. They similarly used a "first day" date to align Christ's resurrection with the inauguration of weekly first-day worship in the new covenant church. Each of the Gospel writers identify the resurrection day as a day when Jesus called his disciples to gather to him (Mt 28:7; Mk 16:7; Lk 24:33-34; Jn 20:17), and two of the Gospels provide extended descriptions of original "first day" worship services similar to those in which later Christians would share (Lk 24:13-53; Jn 20:19-23). These "first day" references further illustrate the usefulness of dates in biblical narratives to align divine events with the calendar days on which his people remembered and participated in those events through worship.

Part I

ISRAEL'S CALENDARS



CALENDARS IN THE SKY

WHEN YOUR FRIEND PROMISES to "check the calendar," she will likely consult an app on her smartphone or a printed calendar on her desk. But to "check the calendar" in ancient Israel would require looking to the skies. Israel's calendar was not on paper or scrolls. Like other ancient nations, Israel observed the calendar revealed in the movements of the sun, moon, and stars (Gen 1:14).

The ancient Hebrews also had different reasons for consulting the cosmic calendar than we have for checking calendars today. Nowadays we use calendars to coordinate plans between people—to "get on the same page" with friends, coworkers, and other organizations regarding work schedules, meetings, birthdays, and so forth. In the ancient world, the cosmic calendar was "read" to coordinate one's activities with the nation's deity.[1] The movements of the sun, moon, and stars were regarded as signs from the divine realm, provided for humans to follow to ensure heaven's blessings on their plantings and harvests. Therefore, to "check the calendar" was a religious duty[2]—and the fruitfulness of society depended on it.

Ancient peoples developed worship festivals to mark the various seasonal harvests. Those festivals typically had religious stories attached to them. Festival stories provided an "interpretation" of the festivals and the deity whose blessings were critical to the land's fruitfulness. All nations looked to the same sun, moon, and stars as their "clock," but different nations developed different understandings of the divine order revealed by that heavenly clock. But one

theme is found repeatedly in calendrical observances throughout the ancient world.

In the ancient Near East, the seasons cycle between periods of death and dryness, on the one hand, and rainfall bringing new life, on the other. This "death and new life" principle is woven into calendrical festivals throughout the ancient world. Farmers across cultures recognized the life-giving character of the Creator instilled in the seasonal cycles, and through their disparate national festivals they sought to participate in that divine gift of life to produce a fruitful crop and thriving societies. Ancient peoples adopted festival observances that timed their rituals of humility and their festivals of praise with the various cadences of "dying" and "new life" that governed the seasons revealed from heaven's calendar.

Israel's Calendar Among the Nations

Many societies of the ancient world recognized this life-giving principle inscribed into nature.[3] The ancient Canaanite kingdom of Ugarit, for example, adopted a mythical narrative for its seasonal festivals known to scholars as the Baal Epic.

In the Baal Epic, these Canaanite worshipers reviewed the myth of the Canaanite storm god Baal, who desired to build a palace for himself. Baal's enemy was Mot, the god of death. Mot initially defeated Baal and confined him to the underworld. During the storm god's confinement, the land went without rain and thus shared in Baal's death. But then Baal defeated Mot and escaped. He restored rain to the land and finally built his desired palace, the temple where he was to be worshiped.[4] The Baal Epic provided a narrative framework for the seasonal changes and harvests of Baal worshipers. "In reality," Theodor Herzl Gaster explains, "[the Baal Epic] is a nature myth and its theme is the alternation of the seasons."[5]

A similar pattern can be found in other ancient calendars.[6] The Sumerian festivals were set within a story of the dying and rising of the god Dumuzi.[7] Ur's calendar identified the changing seasons with a mythical contest between Utu,

the sun deity, and Nanna, the moon deity.[8] In Babylonia, yet another instance of this pattern is found, ritually guiding the Mesopotamian peoples through their seasonal changes.[9] Egyptian festivals annually rehearsed the mythical death of Osiris, slain by Set and then restored to life as Horus. The rites of the Osiris myth were observed in cadence with the flooding of the Nile River, which brought fertility back to the Egyptian farmland each summer. "The Egyptian myth-makers . . . relied on observation of the natural world. The continuance of life through procreation provided a natural symbol for the order of the universe, and . . . [reveals] that beyond the natural world there is a divine mind. In this divine mind the Egyptians saw the ultimate reason for the ongoing cycle of the natural world."[10]

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul referred to such Gentile myths as "seek[ing] God" (see Acts 17:27; cf. Acts 14:17). According to Paul, the world itself reveals the "invisible attributes" of God, "namely, his eternal power and divine nature" (Rom 1:20). Even the religious festivals of Gentile nations showed that "the work of the law is written on their hearts" (Rom 2:15). All nations recognized the life-giving character and power of the Creator, and through their festival calendars they sought after him.

Israel also had an annual series of festivals coordinated with the harvests of the land as well as a narrative that provided a theological interpretation of the "death to life" pattern manifest in the seasons. However, Israel did not resort to myth for its redemption narrative. A myth is a story that explains present, this-worldly realities through a description of primeval, other-worldly causes such as battles between the gods. Israel had a *historical* experience of the Creator's redemptive goodness. They had experienced the life-renewing redemption of God in their deliverance from slavery and his carrying them into a "land of milk and honey." The people could hope in God's goodness toward their labors in the land because he had shown such mercy and grace to bring them out of Egypt and into the land in the first place. The events of the exodus were therefore attached to Israel's festival calendar, providing a historical (rather than mythical) redemption narrative for the nation's worship and labor through their seasonal harvests.

The Hebrew festival calendar, therefore, was *like* those of other nations in that it was shaped around the seasonal cadences governed by the heavenly lights, but it was *unlike* those of other nations in that its framing narrative was historical rather than using the form of a myth.[11] Later in this book (chapter four), we will look more closely at Israel's festival narratives in the Pentateuch. In the remainder of this chapter and in the next, I want to provide a more detailed exploration of the natural (that is, nature-based) shape of Israel's cosmic calendar.

The "Clock" Behind Israel's Calendar

In Genesis 1:14-15, God appointed the heavenly lights to serve as Israel's calendar. "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the span of the heavens to separate between the day [*yôm*] and the night [*laylâ*], and let them be for signs [*ʾōtōt*], and for festivals [*môʿădîm*] and for days [*yāmîm*] and years [*šānîm*]. And let them be for lights in the span of the heavens for the light upon the earth.' And it was so" (a.t.).

This passage is structured around three "let there be"/"let them be" statements.[12] In the first, the lights are appointed "to separate between the day [*yôm*] and the night [*laylâ*]." The first purpose assigned to the heavenly lights is to provide each individual day with its cadence. The second "let them be" statement introduces a broader, calendar-keeping role of the heavenly lights. "Let them be for signs [*ʾōtōt*], and for festivals [*môʿădîm*] and for days [*yāmîm*] and years [*šānîm*]." The Hebrew construction of the phrase foregrounds the term *signs* (*ʾōtōt*),[13] which includes regular cosmic events like equinoxes and solstices that govern the changes in earth's seasons, as well as irregular cosmic events like eclipses and comets. Some nations used the sighting of irregular signs in the heavens for fortunetelling, a practice the Hebrews were exhorted to repudiate (Deut 18:9-14; Jer 10:2). Certain irregular signs have occasionally been used by God to mark special works of heaven in the world, like the rainbow (called a "sign" in Gen 9:12) and the star of Bethlehem (Mt 2:2).[14] But the primary signs indicated by this usage are the regular movements of the sun, moon, and stars

that indicate the changing seasons. These signs were appointed, Genesis 1:14 states, for marking "festivals [*môʿădîm*]" and for marking "days [*yāmîm*] and years [*šānîm*]."

The term *môʿădîm* ("festivals") is commonly translated "seasons" in English Bibles.[15] However, as Walter Vogels asserts, "the word *moʿed* in the Torah never means the seasons of the year such as winter, spring, summer and fall . . . The word means 'fixed times' for festivals."[16] Leviticus 23:1-44 provides a typical list of such "appointed festivals [*môʿădîm*] of the LORD" (Lev 23:2, a.t.), listing the weekly sabbath, and the annual festivals of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths. The role of the heavenly signs to indicate festivals is paired with their role to govern the overarching calendar indicated by the merism "and for days [*yāmîm*] and years [*šānîm*]." A merism is a phrase that describes a spectrum of items by naming the two ends of the spectrum. In this case, days and years indicate the full scope of the calendar: particularly days, months, and years.[17] Indeed, it is the tracking of days, months, and years that enables the scheduling of the aforementioned festivals. The days (and months) and years are the divisions of time *directly* regulated by the heavenly lights, while the festivals are *indirectly* governed by the heavenly lights, being based on the days, months, and years. Thus, the heavenly lights in their movements were, quite literally, the clock and calendar of Israel. "The calendrical purpose of the luminaries," says Guillaume, "can hardly be more clearly stated."[18]

The final "let them be" statement in this verse introduces a third role appointed for the lights—namely, to provide "the light upon the earth." Modern societies regulate working hours by artificial lighting, but our ancestors were dependent on the luminaries in the heavens. Those "let there be"/"let them be" statements indicate the three purposes assigned to the heavenly lights: (1) to separate day and night, (2) to give the signs that regulate festivals through the tracking of days (and months) and years, and (3) to provide light on the earth.

Our primary interest in this book is on the first purpose and especially the second purpose as the calendar of Israel. In the remainder of the present chapter, I want to look more closely at how the "days [and months] and years" were signified by the heavenly lights. Then in the next chapter, we will look at three special groupings of days and months and years: the week (of seven days), the seven festival months, the sabbath year (after seven years), and the jubilee (after seven sevens of years). After that, we will explore how Israel's seven annual festivals were observed in keeping with the heavenly calendar.

The Day

The Hebrew day began at sunrise and ended at sunset. The nighttime that followed sunset was technically marginal time rather than a part of any day. Technically, the day was only the hours between sunrise and sunset.[19] When activities occurred at night, the nighttime was generally considered part of the preceding day. Or when one woke early while yet dark, those nighttime events would be considered part of the coming day. The dark hours were not technically part of either day but constituted a marginal period between the days. Nevertheless, since the new day did not begin until sunrise the next morning, a "full" day ran from sunrise to sunrise.

This way of reckoning the day differs with modern Jewish practice. At some point, intertestamental Judaism came to regard the day as running from sunset to sunset.[20] This later approach to reckoning the day may have derived in part from a misreading of Leviticus 23:32, which instructs the people to honor the Day of Atonement (the tenth day of the seventh month) by fasting from the evening of the ninth day until the evening of the tenth day. Because this holy day fast was observed from evening to evening, the custom arose to observe all days from evening to evening.[21] But even that text states that the fast began on the evening of the ninth day, being the day before the Day of Atonement (the tenth day).[22]

Sometimes, the "evening and morning" phrase in Genesis 1:1–2:3 is cited as evidence for the later view that the day began with sunset.[23] However, that phrase does not describe the full day as constituting evening and morning. The

"evening and morning" (or "evening *unto* morning") is the boundary that marks the end of a day prior to the beginning of the next with the morning sunrise. In the creation week, the Creator worked during the daylight hours followed by the evening and morning. Altogether, the daytime and the evening until morning composed the days of Genesis 1:1–2:3.[24] The original pattern in Old Testament Israel was to regard the day as beginning with sunrise (cf. Gen 1:5; 8:22; 19:33-34; Ex 16:23-25; 24:18; 34:28; Lev 7:15; 22:30; Num 9:11; 33:3; Deut 9:9, 11, 18, 25; 10:10; Josh 5:10; Judg 19:4-9; 1 Sam 19:11; 28:18-19; 1 Kgs 19:8).[25]

The Month

The basis for the month is indicated by its name. Even in English, the word *month* derives from the Old English word for "moon" (*mōna*). In Hebrew, there is no word that strictly means "month." Biblical Hebrew speaks of the coming and going of each successive "moon" (*ḥōdeš*, sometimes *yārēaḥ*). Thus, when Moses was hidden by his mother for three months, the text literally says, "She hid him for *three moons* [*šəlōšâ yərāḥîm*]" (Ex 2:2, a.t.).

A new month/moon began when the first sliver of the new moon was sighted. Typically the priesthood made these observations and reported the first sighting to the king, who authorized its proclamation with trumpets (Num 10:10).[26] The next morning—being the "first day" of the new moon—marked a new moon feast day (Num 28:11-15; 1 Sam 20:5, 18). The month continued as the moon progressed through its phases (its "lunation"). For the skilled observer, the particular days of the month might even be reckoned by observing the moon's changing size. The practice of approximating the day of the month by lunar shape is attested in Assyrian texts,[27] and other traditional cultures even have a unique name for each day's phase in lunation.[28] Similarly, prior to modern clocks, many cultures approximated the hour of the day by observing the location of the sun on its daily path through the sky.

One consequence of tying the month to lunar observation was that one never knew whether the current month would be twenty-nine or thirty days long. "The interval which constitutes the lunar month (also termed a 'lunation') varies in

length from 29.26 to 29.80 days, and consequently is experienced as a period never less than 29 days nor more than 30 days."[29] In the modern West, our months are no longer tied to the moon and have fixed lengths. But in ancient lands like Israel, the length of the month could be twenty-nine or thirty days depending on when the first sliver of the new moon appeared.[30]

The Year

The final, cosmically signaled division within Israel's calendar is the year, which, like the day, is determined by the sun. Like many ancient societies, Israel regarded the month of the vernal equinox and the onset of spring as the beginning of the year. The vernal (or spring) equinox is when the sun crosses the equator so that the days begin to grow longer than the nights, and the sun's daily path through the sky trends northward (southward for the Southern Hemisphere). Agriculturally, the vernal equinox marked the end of the winter (the rainy season) and the beginning of spring. In Hebrew it was called the "head of the year" (*mērēšît haššānâ;* Deut 11:12) or the "returning of the year" (*tešūbat haššānâ*; 2 Sam 11:1). That month hosted the Passover Festival, the Feast of Firstfruits, and the weeklong Festival of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:4-14).

The days continued to be longer than the nights through the spring and summer, until the autumnal equinox in the seventh month. The opposite equinox was when the days grew shorter than the nights, and the dry season gave way to the next rainy season. The autumnal equinox was called the "turning of the year" (*təqûpat haššānâ;* Ex 34:22, a.t.) or the "going out of the year" (*ṣēʾt haššānâ;* Ex 23:16, a.t.). During that month, Israel celebrated the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the seven-day Feast of Booths (Lev 23:23-43). The agriculturally intense dry season, when all the crops were periodically harvested, occurred during the previous half of the year between the spring and fall equinoxes. All but one of Israel's seven festivals occurred in the first or seventh months, being the months of the two equinoxes. The only Hebrew festival celebrated between the equinoctial months was the Feast of Weeks in the third

month.[31] The months after the autumn equinox until the next spring composed Israel's rainy season.

The rainy season was a time for planting the next year's crops. About four inches of rain fell in Canaan during "the early rains" (around the eighth month of the year). This softened the ground so farmers could get their seed into the earth. Heavier rains (typically four to six inches a month) fell throughout the rainy season, helping the crops to grow. Tapering off in the springtime, a final burst came as "the later rains," (generally around the twelfth month of the year; see Deut 11:14; Jer 5:24), which ensured a good crop.[32]

In concept, the solar year is straightforward. However, the solar year comprises lunar months, and twelve lunations do not exactly coincide with the solar year. Twelve cycles of the moon cover 354.37 days, while a solar year covers 365.25 days. Thus, the solar year has approximately eleven more days than required for the completion of twelve moons. Some sort of intercalation, like adding a thirteenth month every few years, would have been necessary to keep lunar months synchronized with the seasons of the solar year.[33]

The Bible preserves no instructions for how intercalation was done in Israel,[34] but we have records of the intercalation methods of other period societies. Mark Cohen writes, "Intercalated months [in Mesopotamia] were named with the same name as the preceding month, the scribe appending the number '2' after the month name or adding the word 'extra' (DIRI) to distinguish it from the previous month."[35] Such an "extra" month was probably added on an ad hoc basis whenever the seasons began to fall out of sync with the proper months.[36] It was not until 500 BC that the Persians developed the mathematical basis to predict seasonal slippage, leading to the creation of a regular system of intercalation. Over the course of nineteen years, the Persians systematically added an extra twelfth month at the end of years 1, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, and an extra sixth month in the middle of year 18.[37] Israel must have observed some form of intercalation to keep its months in cadence with the solar seasons, but we cannot be certain how this was done.[38]

Excursus: New Year's Day in Israel and Canaan

Israel started the year in the spring, but this was a remarkable break from the pattern of the indigenous Canaanites, who regarded the *autumnal* equinox and the *rainy* season as the beginning of the year.[39]

For the indigenous Canaanites, it was the season of planting that marked the beginning of the year's labors. One can recognize the sensibility of this perspective. In fact, some *Hebrew* farmers may have adopted the custom of the Canaanites, viewing the autumn planting season (rather than the spring harvests) as the starting point of the year. A tenth-century BC Hebrew calendar text found in Gezer (the "Gezer Calendar") describes the staged labor of a Hebrew farming family with an autumn start:[40]

Two months of ingathering (olives)	[ca. September/October]
Two months of sowing (cereals)	[ca. November/December]
Two months of late sowing (legumes and vegetables)	[ca. January/February]
A month of hoeing weeds (for hay)	[ca. March]
A month of harvesting barley	[ca. April]
A month of harvesting (wheat) and measuring (grain)	[ca. May]
Two months of grape harvesting	[ca. June/July]
A month of ingathering summer fruit	[ca. August]

This archaeological find may reflect the persistent influence of Canaanite thinking about the shape of the year in Israel. From a laboring standpoint, it makes sense to consider the autumnal equinox (rather than the spring equinox) and the season of planting (rather than the first harvests) as the beginning of the year. Nevertheless, Israel was taught to observe the month of the first spring

harvests as the beginning of their year: "This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you" (Ex 12:2). The double emphasis on the phrase "for you" indicates the importance of this command as a deliberate break from what other nations around Israel observed.

Richard Hess suggests the following reason for this break with other Canaanite practices: "Israel's focus on the period of harvesting [as the beginning of the year] . . . suggest[s] that Israel recognized the harvest as given by God and emphasized divine ownership of it."[41] In other words, to start the year with bounty rather than with labor was a demonstration of the grace of Israel's God giving them a land already flowing with milk and honey (Lev 23:10; cf. Deut 6:11; Josh 24:13). For Israel, seed did not bring harvest; harvest provided seed. The appointment of the year to begin with the *spring* equinox may have been a deliberate, theologically significant break from the practice of the Canaanites.

Despite this Old Testament pattern, contemporary Judaism celebrates New Year's Day (Rosh Hashanah) in the seventh month. Judaism has come to speak of *two* overlapping calendars, each with a different New Year's day. Judaism now observes a *ritual* year starting with the biblical New Year's Day in the first month (in springtime) as well as an overlapping *civil* year that begins with the Feast of Trumpets in the seventh month (in the autumn). The Feast of Trumpets on the first day of the seventh month has been renamed Rosh Hashanah ("Beginning of the Year"). However, this is not a biblical title for that festival, nor is the announcement of a new year its original function.[42] Nevertheless, the evidence of the Gezer Calendar as well as the recasting of the Feast of Trumpets as Rosh Hashanah by later Judaism both underscore the oddity of a calendar that begins with the harvesting season rather than planting season. But for Israel, it was not the season of planting that was to mark the start of the year. Rather, Israel was taught to begin each year as recipients of God's blessing.[43] From spring equinox to spring equinox (rather than autumn equinox to autumn equinox), Israel began its solar year with bounty.

Conclusion

Today, holidays are regulated by law and official time is kept by atomic clocks. In America, Congress passes legislation setting the dates for federal holidays, and the United States Naval Observatory maintains two master clock facilities where high performance atomic clocks provide the official time. While effective and precise for regulating the nation today, these are artificial methods of keeping time. The modern experience of time is remarkably independent from nature. Our day begins in the middle of the night, our month begins with no regard for the moon, and our year begins in the middle of winter (in the Northern Hemisphere; in the middle of summer in the Southern Hemisphere).[44] Calendars today have only limited connection to the world's natural seasons.

In ancient Israel, the nation's calendar and clock were literally "in the skies." The three main divisions of the calendar—day, month, and year—were *directly* governed by the sun and the moon. The Hebrew calendar also included "complete" groupings of these divisions: particularly groups of seven days (the week), the seven festival months, and sevens of years (the sabbath and jubilee years). Seven was emblematic of completion, not only in Hebrew but throughout the ancient Near East,[45] so the grouping of seven days, seven months, and seven years indicated a full or complete period of days, months, or years. We will look more closely at these groupings of time divisions in the next chapter.

Genesis 1:14 ascribes the running of these heavenly chronographs to the hand of God. He put them into the skies and appointed them as signs for the days and festivals of Israel. To follow the celestial calendar was to live on earth in keeping with the cadence of heaven. For ancient Israel, the calendar was in the skies.



CYCLES OF SEVENS

IT IS HARD TO MISS THE SIGNIFICANCE of the number seven in the Bible. Sometimes seven is used as a mundane number, but often it is used to indicate an ideal or complete complement of whatever is being counted.

Ruth was praised as better than "seven sons" for Naomi (Ruth 4:15). The ideal council of the wise comprises "seven men who can answer with discernment" (Prov 26:16, a.t.). Joshua led his army around Jericho over seven days, circling the city seven times on the seventh day, led by seven priests with seven trumpets (Josh 6:1-7). Jacob bowed seven times before his brother Esau to demonstrate his humility (Gen 33:3). The menorah in the temple had seven branches with seven lamps on it (Ex 25:31-37). And so on. Gary Cohen writes, "Scripture does use *sheba'* [seven] often as a mystic sign-word, and the fair-minded lexicographer can hardly fail to note this."[1]

The primary significance of the number seven is completeness. In Israel and throughout the ancient Near East, seven came to represent fullness or perfection. It is not certain how this meaning developed,[2] but its use in this manner is evident in texts and artifacts from throughout the ancient world. Israel applied the number seven extensively, including in its calendar. There were seven festivals in the Hebrew year, all of which fell during the first seven months of the year. The two longest festivals were each seven days in length. Furthermore, the smallest and largest divisions of the calendar were given special groupings of seven: seven days (the day being the smallest division of the calendar) made a week, culminating in the sabbath, and seven years (the year being the largest

division of the calendar) culminated in a sabbath year—and seven sabbath years in a jubilee. As we get acquainted with the calendars of Israel, I want to examine these groupings of seven in the present chapter.

The Week

The origin of the seven-day week is debated,[3] but most scholars believe that the week is a grouping of days based on symbolism of the number seven. The most extensive biblical description of the week is the creation account in Genesis 1:1–2:3. The passage recounts the Creator's work reaching completion, celebrated with rest on the seventh day. This concept of completion within seven days is further expressed in the Decalogue: "Six days you shall labor, *and do all your work*, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work" (Ex 20:9-10). The exhortation to "do all [*kol*] your work" during the week further draws out the notion of a week as a complete period of days.

Some scholars believe that the week also has its own direct dependence on the heavenly lights, arguing that the week originated in the cadence marked by the phases of the moon.[4] Dividing the twenty-nine/thirty-day month into the moon's four quarters would approximate the resulting seven-day weeks. "From very early times," Nahum Sarna explains, "a seven-day period as the basic unit of time calculation was current among West Semitic peoples. In the Mesopotamian lunar calendar the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first and twenty-eighth day of certain months, corresponding to the four phases of the moon were [observed]."[5] In fact, some scholars believe that the "significance [of the number seven] may derive from the four phases of the moon being regarded as seven-day periods."[6] In other words, the seven-day phases of the moon may be where the notion of completeness first became attached to this number. Furthermore, some suggest that the Hebrew word *sabbath* (*šabbāt*, "to cease or rest") may be related to the Akkadian *šabattu* ("sit"), which was used for the four points during the month when the moon "sat,"[7] or the Ugaritic *šuptu* ("a station of the moon").[8] These etymological connections are speculative, but the widespread

importance of the moon's four phases in ancient calendars is surprisingly absent in Israel if the week is not attached to them.

We know that Israel observed a lunar month that varied between twenty-nine and thirty days . The ideal month in Israel was regarded as having thirty days (e.g., Num 20:29; Deut 34:8; Esther 4:11; Dan 6:7, 12),[9] although sometimes an actual month would have twenty-nine. It is conceivable that Israel also observed a lunar week. Most of the time this would be seven days long, and the ideal week would be regarded as having seven days (comparable to the ideal month having thirty days). But at least once a month, an eight-day week would be required. We know that Israel's solar year required periodic intercalation to stay aligned with the lunar months; perhaps the week, similarly, had a typical length of seven days but required occasional intercalation as well. Any society that follows the heavenly lights as its calendar will be accustomed to slight variations and the need for intercalations.

The early Ethiopian calendar had an eight-day week (called a *ʾsāmên*) that was intercalated to retain its compatibility with the lunar month. "Along similar lines," Eviatar Zerubavel adds, "many of the ancient Chinese *hsüns* and Greek *decades*, which were normally ten days long, had to be only nine days long."[10] The ancient Roman calendar celebrated "Kalends . . . the day after the evening on which the crescent had been first sighted. The Nones would have been the day when the moon was at the first quarter . . . The Ides would be the day of the full moon."[11] It is possible that the Old Testament week enjoyed similar flexibility, being normally seven days but occasionally stretched to eight according to the moon's phases.[12]

If the Hebrew week was intercalated to align with the moon's phases, however, the Scriptures do not report it. But they do not record the processes to intercalate the months or years either. The strongest evidence in Scripture to support the lunar week thesis is the frequent link between new moon days and sabbaths. Old Testament writers often mention the new moon day in parallel with the weekly sabbath, as though they are both part of the lunar calendar (Is 1:13; 66:23; Ezek 46:1; Hos 2:11; Amos 8:5; 2 Kgs 4:23; cf. Ben Sira 43:6-7). Psalm 81:3 further speaks of worship assemblies happening on "the new moon"

and also “at the full moon.” This might be a merism indicating that worship took place on the new moon and the full moon and each of the phases in between, thus indicating sabbaths held on the moon’s phases. The evidence is sketchy but suggestive. Some conclude from these references that both the month and the week were correlated to lunar observations. If this is so, then the heavenly lights directly govern “days, [*and weeks*, and months,] and years” (Gen 1:14), with two divisions ruled by the sun (day and year) and two by the moon (week and month).

The proposal is intriguing, but it remains speculative and its resolution is not essential for the purposes of this volume. The general consensus of scholars is that the week is a grouping of seven days analogous to the groupings of years into sevens. Whether or not the phases of the moon had any influence on the original character of the week, the seven-day grouping is regarded in the Bible as a full set of days ending in rest.

The Festival Months

Twelve lunar months occurred in the normal Hebrew year, with an intercalated month added every few years.[13] There is no way to subdivide twelve (or thirteen) months into even groups of sevens. Consequently, there was no grouping of months into sevens in quite the same way that days and years were grouped. Nevertheless, the first seven months of every year were grouped together as the “festival year” of Israel.

We are accustomed to four seasons in temperate regions of the world: spring, summer, autumn, and winter. In the Mediterranean world, however, the year features essentially two seasons: the dry season and the rainy season. This cadence divides the year into a rhythm roughly analogous to the daytime and nighttime pattern of the solar day. In Israel, the first seven months of the year were regarded as the proper year (analogous to the daylight hours being the proper day), while the rainy months were marginal time between the years (analogous to the darkness hours being marginal time between days).[14] As noted in the previous chapter, the first month of the year (marked by the vernal

equinox) was called the “head of the year” (*mērēšît haššānâ;* Deut 11:12) or the “returning of the year” (*tešûbat haššānâ*; 2 Sam 11:1). The seventh month (marked by the autumnal equinox) was called the “turning of the year” (*təqûpat haššānâ;* Ex 34:22) or the “going out of the year” (*ṣēʾt haššānâ;* Ex 23:16). The year ended (“went out”) with the seventh month in the same way that the day ended with sunset, only to “return” the next spring/dawn. The rainy season filled a marginal period at the close of the year and was counted as part of the previous year by “addendum,” the same way the night filled the marginal time at the end of the day. All of Israel’s major festivals were completed within those seven dry months of the “proper year,” and there were no festivals (apart from new moon days) during the rainy season.

Thus, Israel’s months were also grouped into a “complete” set of seven. The first seven months—celestially framed by the vernal to autumnal equinoxes and practically indicated by the dry season harvests and their corresponding festivals—comprised the “full” or “complete” festival months of Israel.

The Sabbath Year

Like the sabbath week, Israel also grouped years in sets of seven punctuated with rest (Ex 23:10-11; Lev 25:1-7, 18-22; Deut 15:1-18). Every seventh year was a “sabbath year,” during which Israel was to release any remaining obligations of debt-slaves and to give the land itself a season of rest: “For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard” (Ex 23:10-11). Allowing the land periodic rest was actually necessary for its fruitfulness.

Modern fertilizers enable today’s farmers to plant and harvest continually, artificially restoring nutrients sapped from the ground during the growing season. Ancient societies lacked such fertilization technology and would have discovered by experience (or by divine guidance) that planting a field continuously, year after year, leads to its declining production. The ancient

Ugaritic calendar reflects a similar conviction: in Ugarit, "the ending of one [seven-year] cycle without a harvest was believed to bring on a seven-year cycle of plenty."[15] It may be coincidental that both Israel and Ugarit spoke of a septennial pattern for land fallow, or perhaps it suggests a relationship between the traditions. In any case, Israel was not alone in its fallow-year practices.

There is, however, one serious problem with a septennial pattern for fallowing the land. On its own, one year in seven would not be enough. David Hopkins explains, "A considerably lower ratio of crop to fallow period [than one in seven] has prevailed in the [Canaanite] Highlands, as well as in the rest of the eastern Mediterranean, throughout its history of settlement . . . 'A single fallow year in seven did not suffice . . . , the ground must have been left fallow more often.'"[16] Nutritional demands and historical evidence both indicate that fallowing was practiced more frequently than on sabbath years. This realization leads to one of several possibilities.

One possibility is that the expression *seven years* is idyllic and not literal. Just as the ideal month was thirty days and the ideal year was twelve months, but each of these was adapted based on real observations, likewise the seventh-year rest might expect adjusted timings in practice, based on actual needs. The Old Testament law may use the number of fullness (seven) to indicate the importance of determining the perfect fallowing cadence and not straining the soil beyond that. After all, a single schedule might not serve the varied soil needs of different regions throughout Canaan. Rather than providing a "one size fits all" requirement for exactly seven years, the phrase may represent the duty of rulers to determine the complete period after which a given region of the land needs a fallow year.[17]

Alternately, the seventh year fallow may have been observed on an actual seven-year cadence, with that seventh year as the crowning period of a more complex plan. A septennial land fallow might have been supplemented with "green fallowing" or "crop rotation" in other years. The ancient Romans are known to have practiced a form of green fallowing, in which fields were occasionally planted with legumes that would not be harvested but were plowed back under to restore nitrogen to leached soil.[18] Rotating crops can also

minimize the soil's nutrient depletion since different plants draw on different nutrients. Oded Borowski proposes, "A hypothetical crop rotation in biblical Eretz-Israel could have been: first, third, and fifth year—cereals (wheat, barley); second, fourth, and sixth year—legumes (lentils, bitter vetch, chick-pea, peas); seventh year—fallow."[19]

Another alternative, suggested by Hopkins, is illustrated in the diagram below. In Hopkins's proposed solution, the Hebrew farmer divides his fields into two groups: Field A and Field B. He then alternates cultivating (C) and fallowing (F) between these fields each year, until the sixth year when *all* fields are cultivated (C) to produce enough stores to provide for *all* fields to be fallowed (F) in the seventh year (cf. the promise of an abundant harvest in the sixth year in Lev 25:21).[20]

Field A	C	F	C	F	C	C	F	C	F	C	F	C	C	F
Field B	F	C	F	C	F	C	F	F	C	F	C	F	C	F
years	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	***7***	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	***7***

Figure 2.1. Hopkins's proposed solution for crop rotation

We lack sufficient evidence to resolve the question of how Israel practiced adequate land fallowing. But we do know that some system like one of these alternatives—or perhaps a variety of these and other practices—must have been observed. And whatever various fallowing practices may have been observed, the crowning centerpiece of that pattern resolved in a sabbath year every seventh year.

Moreover, contrary to popular notions, Israel's septennial land fallow did not require an absolute cessation of planting. Leviticus 25:4-7 instructs, "You shall not sow [*zāraʿ*] your field or prune [*zāmar*] your vineyard. You shall not reap [*qāṣar*] what grows of itself in your harvest. . . . The Sabbath of the land shall

provide food for you . . . : all its yield shall be for food." The land was not to be *sown, pruned,* or *harvested*—terms of agricultural production—but was to be given a rest from its "labor." This indicates a cessation of economic production. However, gardens would still be planted for fresh vegetables to eat along with stored grains, and the natural growth of the fields would be eaten also. The sabbath year was not a year to starve but rather to cease using the land for production-scale farming.[21]

These details indicate something important about the sabbath year. Even though it was not directly regulated by the heavenly lights, it had an agricultural benefit. Observing the sabbath year was an important part of the overall purpose of the calendar: stewarding the land for fruitfulness in cooperation with the cadences of God's blessing on it.[22]

The Jubilee Year

After six sabbath years, the seventh was to be a "jubilee." The year of jubilee (Lev 25:8-55) was essentially a "high sabbath year." Readers are often confused by the switch from the number forty-nine to fifty in the way the jubilee year is numbered: "You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you *forty-nine* years. Then you shall sound the loud trumpet. . . . And you shall consecrate the *fiftieth* year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land" (Lev 25:8-10). Is the proclamation of liberty marking the forty-ninth year as the jubilee or introducing the subsequent fiftieth year as the jubilee?

This confusion is quickly resolved when one realizes that Hebrew counting was inclusive. Thus, for example, Jesus' burial on Friday evening and his resurrection on Sunday morning constitutes three days in the tomb, inclusively counting Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. By Western conventions, we would count that as two days in the tomb: Friday to Saturday being one day and Saturday to Sunday being a second day. We generally count exclusively in English-speaking societies, meaning that we exclude the starting day when measuring time from a beginning point to an ending point.

Inclusive counting is evident in the way the weekly sabbath is counted in Scripture. When Scripture speaks of the sabbath day on its own, it is called the seventh day. When, however, the sabbath is counted *with respect to the previous sabbath*, it is called "the eighth day" (Lev 23:39; Jn 20:26). The second sabbath is the eighth day from the previous sabbath when counted inclusively. (See table 2.1.)

It is in this manner that Leviticus calls the jubilee the forty-ninth year (i.e., within the given sequence of seven groups of seven) and also the fiftieth year (i.e., with respect to the previous jubilee).[23] Missing this detail about biblical numeration, some commentators believe the jubilee was an additional "leap year" (a fiftieth year) added after the forty-ninth year, resulting in *two years of land fallow* in a row![24] However, the jubilee year is simply the seventh sabbath year in a series, with special economic liberations attached to this "high sabbath year."

Table 2.1. Counting the sabbath

Counting the sabbath (= 7th day)	**Counting from one sabbath to the next (= 8th day)**
	1—Sabbath
1—Sunday	2—Sunday
2—Monday	3—Monday
3—Tuesday	4—Tuesday
4—Wednesday	5—Wednesday
5—Thursday	6—Thursday
6—Friday	7—Friday
7—Sabbath	***8—Sabbath***

The jubilee year presumably began like any other sabbath year with the observed land fallow. But on the Day of Atonement during the year of jubilee, special proclamations of liberty were made (Lev 25:9-10). Persons and properties that had been indentured or foreclosed through failed debts in the previous generation would all be released to their proper households (Lev 25:23-55). Every landowner in Israel managed his estate in trust as a family heritage. But in every generation there would be business leaders and farmers who—through greed, incompetence, unavoidable circumstances, tragedy, or oppression—might lose or seriously diminish their family heritage: its properties and perhaps its persons. The jubilee was a once-a-generation proclamation of liberty (Lev 25:10) designed to preserve a family's agricultural heritage across the losses of "weak link" generations. It also held in check the economic disparity and oppression that otherwise tends to develop in a society over time. Wealth tends to concentrate into certain families and clans, while other families and clans become trapped in a cycle of poverty. A once-a-generation restoration of family estates helped to maintain the fruitfulness of the overall economy of an ancient kingdom.

Other societies of the ancient world observed a similar once-a-generation debt and land release. The topics of the Hebrew jubilee—and even one of its titles ("proclaim liberty [*dərôr*]," Lev 25:10; cf. Akkadian, *andurārum*)—are mirrored in the generational reforms proclaimed in Mesopotamia. However, the Old Babylonian proclamation of liberty was typically attached to the inauguration of a new king rather than a specified number of years. When a new king arose to the throne in Mesopotamian lands, he would review the economic condition of the nation and issue an edict with specific, targeted cancellations of debts and a manumission of slaves. The purpose of this edict was to solidify the new king's position as the defender of the poor and oppressed and to correct economic imbalances from his predecessor's reign.[25]

For example, the second millennium ruler of Isin, Lipit-Ishtar, recorded the following description of his ascent to the throne:

> At that time the gods An and Enlil called Lipit-Ishtar to the princeship of the land . . . in order to establish justice in the land, to eliminate cries for justice, to eradicate enmity and armed violence,

> to bring well-being to the lands of Sumer and Akkad. At that time, I, Lipit-Ishtar . . . established justice in the lands of Sumer and Akkad. At that time, I liberated the sons and daughters . . . of Sumer and Akkad, who were subjugated [by the yoke(?)], and I restored order.[26]

The stated purpose of these proclamations was to redress the oppression of the poor and to restore order (Akkadian, *mīšarum*) and liberty (Akkadian, *andurārum*) to the land.[27]

Several scholars have provided insightful comparisons between these Mesopotamian edicts and the Hebrew proclamation of liberty.[28] There are significant differences but also striking parallels. In particular, by way of similarity, Israel's jubilee shares the same expectation that economic reforms are necessary once a generation to protect the land from the oppression of a concentrated circle of the powerful. By way of difference, the most distinctive feature of the Hebrew liberation was its fixation to a regular calendar (every forty-nine years). Under Moses, Israel had no human king and thus no generational change marked by a transfer of the throne. It is politically significant that the Mosaic calendar took the generational, economic reforms typically associated with a new king's coronation and, for Israel, affixed such a rebalance to the festival calendar of heaven's rule. The forty-nine-year cycle envisions the same once-a-generation economic reset, but the Mosaic law attached it to the calendar of divine redemption.[29]

From these observations, we note that the jubilee, with its generational timing, was an important part of the cadences put in place by the calendar to ensure the people labored in harmony with God's blessing on their fruitfulness.

Conclusion

In this and the previous chapter, we have examined the various divisions of Israel's calendar. The nation's calendar was inscribed in the heavenly lights, with its basic divisions (day, month, year, and possibly week) directly governed by the sun and moon. Several groupings of sevens are also appended to the calendar: seven days (the week), seven months (the festival months), and sevens

of years (the sabbath year and the jubilee). These groupings indicate complete sets of days and months and years, with rest and restoration provided at the climax of each.

The most important principle to observe in all that we have covered in these chapters is this: God brought Israel into “the land of milk and honey” to bless them there, and the calendar on display in the heavens provided Israel with the cadence to steward their land in harmony with his provision of seasons and rain to make them fruitful in it. The calendar was guidance for Israel’s fruitfulness in the land. In the next chapter, we will explore how the seven worship festivals of Israel fit within this agricultural program. In the chapter after that, we will examine the redemption narratives that provided a theological framework for these agricultural cadences.



THE FESTIVALS OF ISRAEL

Farming was a risky business in Bible times. Many uncertainties threatened each year's harvest, such as the quality of the seed planted, the amount of rainfall received and its timing, the quality of the soil, the presence of pests and disease and wildlife, and the availability of adequate labor. Failure on just one or two of those fronts could spell the demise of an entire harvest. Assessing these challenges, David Hopkins identifies two things as particularly important for economic stability in biblical Israel: "risk spreading and labor optimization."[1]

By risk spreading, we mean that a Hebrew household could not afford to specialize. Rather than farming just one product like wheat, or figs, or just raising cattle, it was essential to maintain a diverse operation. To specialize was too risky, lest the sole staple of your household prove to be the harvest that fails in a given year. Most households in biblical Israel would have been "multi-purpose households, often involved in the activities of several regimes [i.e., frontiers of production] simultaneously."[2] Farming some combination of grains, fruits, olives, livestock, or other products all at the same time was essential. The nation's worship festivals were timed with the various harvests of the year, thereby encouraging such diversity in order to have each season's harvest for the appointed feast. Risk spreading was built into the Hebrew festival calendar.

Labor optimization was also crucial. There was too much work for a nuclear family to be able to survive alone. The typical household, called a *bêt ʾāb* (lit., "father's house[hold]") in biblical Hebrew, included three or four generations

living together under the leadership of the family patriarch (or the eldest son, as the father aged).[3] This yielded a household labor team of twelve to twenty-four individuals, with an uncommonly large house achieving thirty or more.[4] When a *bêt ʾāb* was too large for a single house, a compound was built with two or three homes around a shared courtyard. But even the combined efforts of the united *bêt ʾāb* would be strained when harvesting seasons began. The cadences set by Israel's seven worship festivals, particularly its three pilgrimage festivals, provided a national metronome and coordination system that facilitated communication and collaboration between households at those labor-intense harvesting times.

Israel's festival calendar was not a liturgy for worship divorced from daily life but a rhythm for worship that helped regulate both risk spreading and labor optimization for national fruitfulness. In this chapter, we will look at the seven festivals of Israel in their seasons,[5] with particular interest in the agricultural needs the festivals were timed to facilitate. (See the table of Israel's festivals below and the calendrical display of these festivals across the year at the end of this chapter.)

Table 3.1. Table of Israel's festivals

Season	**Dates**	**Festival** *(pilgrimage festivals in bold)*
Spring	1/14	**Passover**
	1/15	Firstfruits
	1/15–21	Unleavened Bread
	ca. 3/8	**Weeks**
Summer		
Autumn	7/1	Trumpets
	7/10	Atonement
	7/15–22	**Booths**
Rainy Season		

Early Spring: Feasts of Passover, Firstfruits, Unleavened Bread

The Hebrew year began with the barley harvest, the first crop to reach maturity. In fact, the Bible frequently names the first month of the year for its main crop: "the month of barley [*ʾābîb*]" (Ex 13:4; 23:15; 34:18; Deut 16:1, a.t.). Barley and wheat were the two primary grains of Hebrew agriculture, but barley matured a full month earlier than wheat. This timing was crucial to the balanced employment of household work teams. It would have overwhelmed the labor force to harvest all the grains at once. Since wheat matured more slowly, the household could focus on gathering one crop at a time, beginning with barley in the first month.[6] That same month was also the beginning of lambing season. The flocks were being moved from their winter pasturage back to local fields, and the sheep were giving birth to their young.[7]

The first harvest of the new year was celebrated with the calendar's first three festivals: Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits. Although three distinct festivals, they all took place during the same eight days in the middle of the first month, just before the heavy work of the barley harvest began.

During the opening weeks of the year, households harvested the firstfruits from their fields and undertook their first annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. After arriving in Jerusalem, on the evening of the fourteenth day (likely the first full moon of the year), the feast of Passover was celebrated (Lev 23:5). The Passover meal (a reminder of the departure from Egypt; Ex 12:27) was the last meal eaten exclusively from the stores of the old year's grain and with the slaughter of a lamb from the previous year's lambs (Ex 12:5).

On the next day (the fifteenth day of the month), the people presented their ceremonial "first sheaf" from the new barley harvest then standing in their fields, about to be gathered. This was the Feast of Firstfruits, and on "this same day" the people began to eat from the new year's barley harvest (Lev 23:9-14).[8] In fact, for an entire week the people celebrated God's gift of the new harvest with unleavened bread prepared with the new grain: the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Unleavened bread involved a much quicker and less labor-intensive baking

process. This was to remind the people of the suddenness with which the Lord's salvation came, bringing them out of Egypt (Ex 12:33-34; cf. Deut 16:3). From the fifteenth until the twenty-first day, the people celebrated God's deliverance to this new land of plenty, eating unleavened bread from the preliminary intake of the new year's first grain harvest (Lev 23:6-7, 14).[9] This celebration ended with a gathering for worship on the twenty-first day (Lev 23:6-7).

After that week, the intense harvesting of the barley crop would begin. Gathering at the central place of worship provided an opportunity to celebrate, and it also served a crucial economic function. The pilgrimage festival facilitated an assessment of the overall harvest, identifying what regions had bumper crops and which had suffered a poor growing season. It would also be possible to share information on the readiness of crops in various regions. Dependent on that year's rainfall and regional temperatures, the barley would actually be ready for harvest in different parts of the country at slightly different times. As Milgrom notes, "A farmer in the mountainous area near Jerusalem, where cooler weather prevailed, harvested his grain three to four weeks later than a farmer in the Jordan Valley."[10] The exact timing of harvesting would not necessarily coincide with the dates when these festivals were observed.[11] But the exchange of information at the pilgrimage festival enabled better labor planning. Households needing more work could hire teams from those with hands to spare, and teams could collaborate around fields ready for immediate picking in exchange for help with those fields still maturing another few weeks. Day laborers unattached to any particular estate could seek employment during the festival gathering (see Ruth 2:23).[12]

The first pilgrimage of the year was a worship assembly, but it also had economic importance for Israel's fruitfulness in the land. Guided by these first month festivals—Passover, Firstfruits, and Unleavened Bread—Israel transitioned from their winter diet of stored grain to their spring diet featuring fresh grain and meat. This liturgy also facilitated a well-organized start to the year's harvests.

Excursus: The Date of Firstfruits

The date for the Feast of Firstfruits is debated, and its identification here as the fifteenth of the month requires explanation. Leviticus 23:11 says only that the firstfruits were to be offered "on the day after the Sabbath," without stating which sabbath is meant during the Passover-Unleavened Bread week. Arguments have been advanced for the Passover day itself (the fourteenth), another sabbath occurring during the week of Unleavened Bread, or one of the convocation days of the Unleavened Bread week (the fifteenth or the twenty-first).[13] However, decisive evidence for understanding "the day after the Sabbath" to mean the fifteenth of the month (i.e., the day after Passover, the fourteenth) is found in two related texts.

First, Numbers 28:16-17 lists the three feasts of the first month, saying, "On the fourteenth day . . . is the LORD's Passover," then "on the fifteenth day of this month is a feast [*ḥag*]," and finally, "seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten." The middle feast here (between Passover and Unleavened Bread) is best understood as the Feast of Firstfruits, which is here specifically dated to the fifteenth. Some scholars believe the "feast" [*ḥag*] in Numbers 28:17 refers to the first convocation day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:7) and not to the Feast of Firstfruits.[14] However, it seems that the Feast of Firstfruits *was* the convocation held on the first day of Unleavened Bread, just as the convocation on the Feast of Weeks was also called "the day of [wheat] firstfruits" (Num 28:26). Numbers 28:1–29:40 is a complete list of festivals, and unless the feast on the fifteenth day of the first month is Firstfruits, the list is missing one festival. It is best to understand "the feast [*ḥag*]" in Numbers 28:17, dated to the fifteenth day of the first month, as being Firstfruits.

Confirmation for this interpretation is found in Joshua 5:10-11, which reports Israel's first observance of the Passover week festivals upon entering the Promised Land. "While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. And the day after the Passover [the fifteenth], on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain."[15] This passage identifies the fifteenth as the day the people had their first taste of the fruit of the

land. This reflects the purpose of the Feast of Firstfruits, which Leviticus 23:14 identified as the day when the first produce of the new year was eaten. In fact, the verbal correspondence between Leviticus 23:14 and Joshua 5:11 is striking: "And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh [*wəleḥem wəqālî wəkarmel*] until this same day [*ʿad-ʿeṣem hayyôm hazzeh*]" (Lev 23:14); "And the day after Passover, on that very day [*bəʿeṣem hayyôm hazzeh*], they ate . . . unleavened cakes and parched grain [*maṣṣôt wəqālûy*]" (Josh 5:11). These two passages confirm that "the day after the Sabbath" on which Firstfruits was observed was the fifteenth of the month, being the day after Passover observed on the fourteenth.

Late Spring: Feast of Weeks

After the barley harvest was finished, the wheat would be ready. The second pilgrimage festival of the year was another firstfruits festival, but this time to mark the beginning of the wheat harvest. This festival was a much shorter affair—just a one-day assembly. It was called the "Feast of Weeks" because it took place seven weeks after the firstfruits of barley was offered (Lev 23:15-16).[16]

These grain harvests were the most intense periods of work in the year. In addition to gathering grain from the fields, the harvested stalks had to be transported to the local threshing floor, laid out to dry in the sun, threshed and winnowed, and the grain regathered and sieved to clean it. Finally, the grain had to be measured and stored.[17] All this needed to be done as soon as the crop was ready.[18] The ability to complete the barley harvest before turning to the standing wheat was a great benefit for maximizing the quantity of grain grown with a limited workforce. The seven weeks between the Feast of Firstfruits (when the first sheaf of barley was presented) and the Feast of Weeks (when the wheat firstfruits was presented) were busy. The Feast of Weeks would have occurred in the third month (roughly May) as the wheat was reaching maturity.

The Feast of Weeks called for another pilgrimage to Jerusalem. There, "you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD" (Lev 23:16). This was the "new grain" of the wheat harvest, but it was prepared differently than the

barley firstfruits. The first barley had been celebrated with a raw sheaf waved before the Lord, followed by the consumption of unleavened bread the following week. In contrast, the wheat harvest was celebrated with fully leavened and baked bread: "You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved. . . . They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the LORD" (Lev 23:17). This time each household was to prepare two loaves of wheat bread, prepared at home and brought to the place of worship. Combined with meat sacrifices (Lev 23:18-20), there would be great feasting and joy at the start of the wheat harvest.

The rejoicing at the Feast of Weeks was not to be shared alone at home. Neither were the prosperous farms to rejoice separately from those families whose harvests were meager (or perhaps had failed that year). "You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you. . . . You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt; and you shall be careful to observe these statutes" (Deut 16:11-12). This feasting was to be a time to remember the hardship of Egyptian slavery and how "the LORD your God blesses you" (Deut 16:10) to bring you to this land of plenty. In the spirit of the season, Leviticus 23 even adds this law of generosity after describing the barley and wheat harvest festivals: "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God" (Lev 23:22; cf. Ruth 2:1-23).

The festivals (especially through the lens of the exodus narrative mapped over them; see chapter four) taught the people to view themselves as stewards of a land that God had given to them. They were being taught to maximize the fruitfulness of the land with gratefulness and with God's love for the poor on their hearts. These calendars provided not only agricultural guidance to maximize harvests but also the backbone for a national welfare system. The pilgrimage required at this midpoint between the two grain harvests was an

opportunity to identify those who were suffering lack, so that those with abundance could share with those in need.

The requirement to share with the poor during the pilgrimage festival (Lev 23:22) probably expected more than just sharing during the festival, instead instituting a more general system of sharing the land's prosperity with those who were lacking year-by-year. Much of a farm's prosperity depends on factors beyond human control—such as soil quality, weather patterns, and birthrates. Showing kindness and generosity to those in need when God has blessed one's farm lays the groundwork to receive help from others when tides shift. Ancient Israel's pilgrimage festivals provided settings for sharing from one's abundance with the needy, as expressed in the feasting instructions quoted above.

After the one-day festival to offer the firstfruits of wheat, the pilgrims returned to their homes, where the second grain harvest would begin.[19] After the wheat was harvested, the labors of the summer crops followed.

Summer: No Festivals

Summer was a season for tending the olives, fruits, and other orchard and vineyard crops that would be harvested in the autumn. Fruit trees and vines require significant work to plant initially. But once they mature, they continue to produce year after year. Their produce also ripens later in the summer, long after the grain has been harvested. Hopkins states that "tree and vine crops contribute . . . in a way that does not sharply compete with but rather complements the other foci of agricultural energies."[20]

Typical fruit trees of the Hebrew household included some combination of figs, dates, pomegranates, and especially olives. As Hopkins notes, all these crops required pruning and weeding: "By far the most simple and least demanding is the fig tree."[21] The fruit of the fig tree ripens in two seasons through the summer: its first crop is ready for picking in June, and the later crop is ready in August or September.[22] The first crop of figs was usually eaten raw, while the later crop was dried and stored. Olive trees fit nicely into the summer harvest schedule since "it does not matter very much if the [ripe] olives are left

on the tree for some time before they are picked, so that the farmer is able to gather his olive harvest whenever his work in the fields gives him time."[23] Olives typically ripen in September or October and are then harvested by beating the branches with sticks to knock the fruit to the ground. The trees were pruned while being harvested since pruning allowed the farmer to get at otherwise inaccessible fruit while also preparing the tree for the next growing season. Once the fallen olives were gathered, they were transported to the local olive press, where they were crushed and pressed and olive oil was extracted.[24]

Tending and gathering dates, pomegranates, and other fruits similarly occupied the Hebrew household through the summer months. But one of the most important summer crops was the grape harvest. Grapevines were generally allowed to grow on the ground, propped up with stones. This type of vineyard required regular hoeing to remove weeds. Occasionally, grapevines were grown on trellises or even in trees.[25] The grapes ripened at different rates in different regions of Israel, but grapes were generally harvested and processed in the late summer months—any time between August and September. Grapes would have to be picked carefully in order not to crush them (note the grape harvesting song in Is 65:8), then transported to the nearest winepress for processing as wine.[26] Some grapes would be eaten raw or dried for raisins, but most grapes were used for wine.

Like the threshing of barley and wheat, which required access to a community threshing floor,[27] the processing of grapes and olives required access to community presses. Archaeological research has confirmed the presence of facilities constructed in various regions of the land used communally for threshing grain, pressing olives, and making wine.[28] Some method of coordination must have been practiced, though little is known about how processing facilities were shared.

Vegetable gardens would also be maintained through the summer. Generally planted close to home, little children could be put to work helping in the gardens where vegetables like lentils, beans, chickpeas, onions, cucumbers, leeks, garlic, and melons were cultivated.[29] Livestock contributed yet one more layer of diversification into the household economy. Sheep, goats, or cattle provided

milk, wool, labor power (as for plowing), breeding, and eventually meat. Herding livestock also allowed a family to use nearby land as pasturage if it was unfit to farm. After the grain crops were harvested in the spring, livestock would also be allowed to feed on remaining stubble in the fields, where their manure would fertilize the soil. Generally, tending sheep and goats was the work of household youth (e.g., Num 14:33; 1 Sam 16:11). Keeping animals did not require the strength of field work, so it served as a way that children could contribute to the diversity of household labor and production. One further benefit of livestock was their service as a "food bank on the hoof."[30] When there is a surplus of grain in good years, portions of that excess can be fed to livestock. Then, in bad years, those "deposits" can be "withdrawn" with the slaughter of livestock.[31]

The summer months were quite busy. However, all the harvesting taking place during the summer was uncoordinated. Only the grain crops had to be harvested immediately when ripe. Completion of the barley and wheat harvests was aided by pilgrimage festivals at the beginning of those times. The variety of summer labors and differing schedules of gathering summer fruits would have been disrupted if there had been summer pilgrimage festivals. Instead, portions from each of the summer harvests were gathered in preparation for the final pilgrimage festival at the end of the harvesting months: the Feast of Booths in the seventh month.

Early Autumn: The Feasts of Trumpets, Atonement, and Booths

As the year's harvesting seasons drew to a close, the seventh month began with the blast of a trumpet: the Feast of Trumpets (Lev 23:24).[32] Every new moon day was announced with a trumpet, but the Festival of Trumpets on the new moon day of the seventh month was different. This trumpet gives a memorial blast (*tərûʿâ;* Lev 23:24), which is not the celebratory sound on other new moon days. This Hebrew noun indicates a blast of alarm. Karl Weyde explains, "The [horn] blasts on the first day were prescribed in order to arouse God's mercy and

help. . . . They prepared for the day of atonement, ten days later: the trumpet blasts on the first day reminded the people of their need for forgiveness, which they were to receive on the day of atonement."[33] At this point in the calendar, as the people were finishing the year's harvests and anticipating their final pilgrimage gathering to feast in God's house (Feast of Booths), they were called to a season of repentance in their homes and communities.

Ten days after the memorial trumpet blast, the Day of Atonement was held (Lev 23:26-32). Unlike other holy days that involved eating (and hence were called feasts or festivals), this holy day was a time to fast. The phrase "afflict yourselves" in the Day of Atonement instructions means to fast (*wəʿinnîtem ʾet-napšōtêkem*, lit., "you shall deprive your throats"; Lev 23:27).[34] This was the only mandatory fast day in Old Testament Israel. The Day of Atonement was also the central focus of all the year's sacrifices.[35] It was the day when the high priest entered the holy place to atone for the nation's sins (Lev 16:1-34). It was not a pilgrimage day, so households would fast in their own homes knowing that the priest was accomplishing their atonement at the temple without necessarily seeing the rites taking place there. However, the Day of Atonement description is the most verbose of the Pentateuch's holy days (see Lev 16:1-34 contrasted with the other festival instructions all combined into Lev 23:1-44). This extensive verbal description may have been provided to facilitate the people's ability to participate in the profound events of that day "virtually" (i.e., by faith though not by sight) while fasting in their local communities.

The two holy days early in the seventh month began preparations for the highest and final festival of the Hebrew year: the Feast of Booths. Consider how great the joy of that feasting would be, as the final harvests are gathered and "atonement [is] made for you to cleanse you . . . before the LORD from all your sins" (Lev 16:30). During the sabbath year and the jubilee (Lev 25:9), and perhaps to a lesser degree during other years, the Day of Atonement was when economic corrections were implemented as part of its overarching ministry of redemption.[36] Then the people gathered for the third and final pilgrimage festival of the year in the middle of the seventh month.

Called the Feast of Booths (or the Feast of Ingathering), this was the climax of the year, with seven days of extravagant rejoicing (Num 28:17-31) from the fifteenth to the twenty-first, followed by a "bonus" day of worship on the twenty-second (Lev 23:33-42). The joy of this gathering was marked by parading into the temple courts waving "the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook" (Lev 23:40). This feasting was possible because of the fruits of the year's final crops that were now harvested. Firstfruits of all the summer fruits would be brought (grapes, dates, figs, pomegranates, and olives; Deut 8:8) as well as the wool from sheep shearing and meat from livestock brought for sacrifices.

Once again, the prosperous households rejoiced and the poor and those whose crops did not fare well were also to be provided for: "You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns . . . because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful" (Deut 16:14-15). This sharing of bounty probably has more than the week itself in view. This festival gathering was a time when, under the management of the temple Levites, measures of distribution could be made to ensure everyone had what was needed to survive through the coming winter. These pilgrimage assemblies likely served as a time for trade, buying and selling goods, storage, and welfare distributions.[37] This was the time when all the harvests, from the spring grains to the autumn fruits, would have been calculated and annual tithes were deposited with the Levites (Deut 14:22-29). Though not mentioned in the Bible's descriptions of the Feast of Booths (probably to avoid dampening the festival message of joy), this was also the likely time for the king to collect his taxes.[38]

Amid all the joy of this festival marking the end of the year's harvests, the people were taught to give thanks to God. The theological significance of the festival, and the reason it was called the "Feast of Booths," is stated in Leviticus 23:42-43: "You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel

dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God." All through the wandering years in the wilderness, the Lord had sheltered and cared for the people, bringing them safely to his holy mountain (cf. the Psalms of Ascent, Pss 120–34, probably sung during the Feast of Booths).[39] The saving grace of God providing for the people was to govern their celebration and generosity at the end of another year's harvest in that land to which God had carried them.

Rainy Season: Plowing and Planting

The festival calendar ended with the seventh month and the end of the year's harvests. Even though the harvests were done, work did not cease. Once the year's crops were gathered and stored, the next season's planting began with the arrival of the rainy season. Jerusalem, at the heart of Canaan, receives the same amount of rainfall each year as London. But London gets its rain in drizzles over about three hundred rainy days. Rain in Israel comes in torrents during the last four months of the year.[40]

By the end of the summer, the soil is hard and dry. During the eighth month (mid-October), the "early rains" bring a heavy downpour that softens the ground. The people regarded this as a work of God to soften the soil so that they could then begin to plow and plant again. The early rains also begin to replenish the moisture in the soil.[41] The timing of this rainfall was one of the vagaries that had an enormous impact on the success or failure of the next year's crop. Too late a planting would not allow adequate time for crops to mature. But if rains came too early—leaving too long an interval before the heavy, latter rains arrived—it meant that "the germinating seeds would die, resulting in a complete loss of crops."[42] Well-timed and consistent rains from heaven were important for a successful harvest the next year.

In addition to planting, the winter months were a time for pruning grapevines[43] and for tending to other projects "such as wall building, clearing new land, removing large rocks and tree stumps from the fields, repairing agricultural installations, . . . house-building, [and other] large labor projects."[44]

By the end of a good rainy season, the crops would be in the ground and growing, and the moisture level in the soil would be replenished to its saturation point to hold water well into the next year's dry season. The rains tapered off with the milder "latter rains." These final, March–April rains are essential, "providing a last shot of moisture to enhance the maturation of grains" before the dry season harvests.[45] And then the harvesting calendar begins all over again.

Conclusions

The festivals of ancient Israel were timed around harvests and were characterized by feasting. Feasting in celebration of God's goodness was central to Israel's holidays, which is why we typically call them "feast days" or "festivals" (Heb. *ḥag*, as in Ex 23:14-17). These terms can be used interchangeably for the holidays of Israel, emphasizing their agricultural significance. The seventh-day sabbath was a day to rest and feast on the week's produce, just as the seventh-month Feast of Booths was a time to rest and feast on the entire year's produce. There was only one holy day marked by fasting: the Day of Atonement. Technically, this was not a festival, since there was no eating on that day. Nevertheless, we typically generalize all the holy days of Israel as their festivals or feast days.

The seven major festivals were grouped around the three harvest periods in the land. The beginning of the barley harvest was marked by Passover, Firstfruits, and Unleavened Bread. The beginning of wheat harvest was marked by the Feast of Weeks. These two spring festivals took place at the beginnings of the two grain harvests, which allowed work crews to organize for the year's most intense periods of labor. The final harvest celebration was held at the end of all the summer harvests, with the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths. This allowed households to manage their various summer harvests at different timings as suitable and to bring from their bounty for community feasting at the end of the year.

In addition to the seven harvest-timed festivals, Israel also celebrated the weekly sabbath (possibly coordinated with the phases of the moon),[46] new moon

days (at the sighting of the first crescent moon on the first day of each month), and New Year's Day (being the first day of the month of the spring equinox). Altogether, these cosmic and agricultural cadences constituted the calendar of Israel. (See the visualization of this calendar at the end of this chapter.)

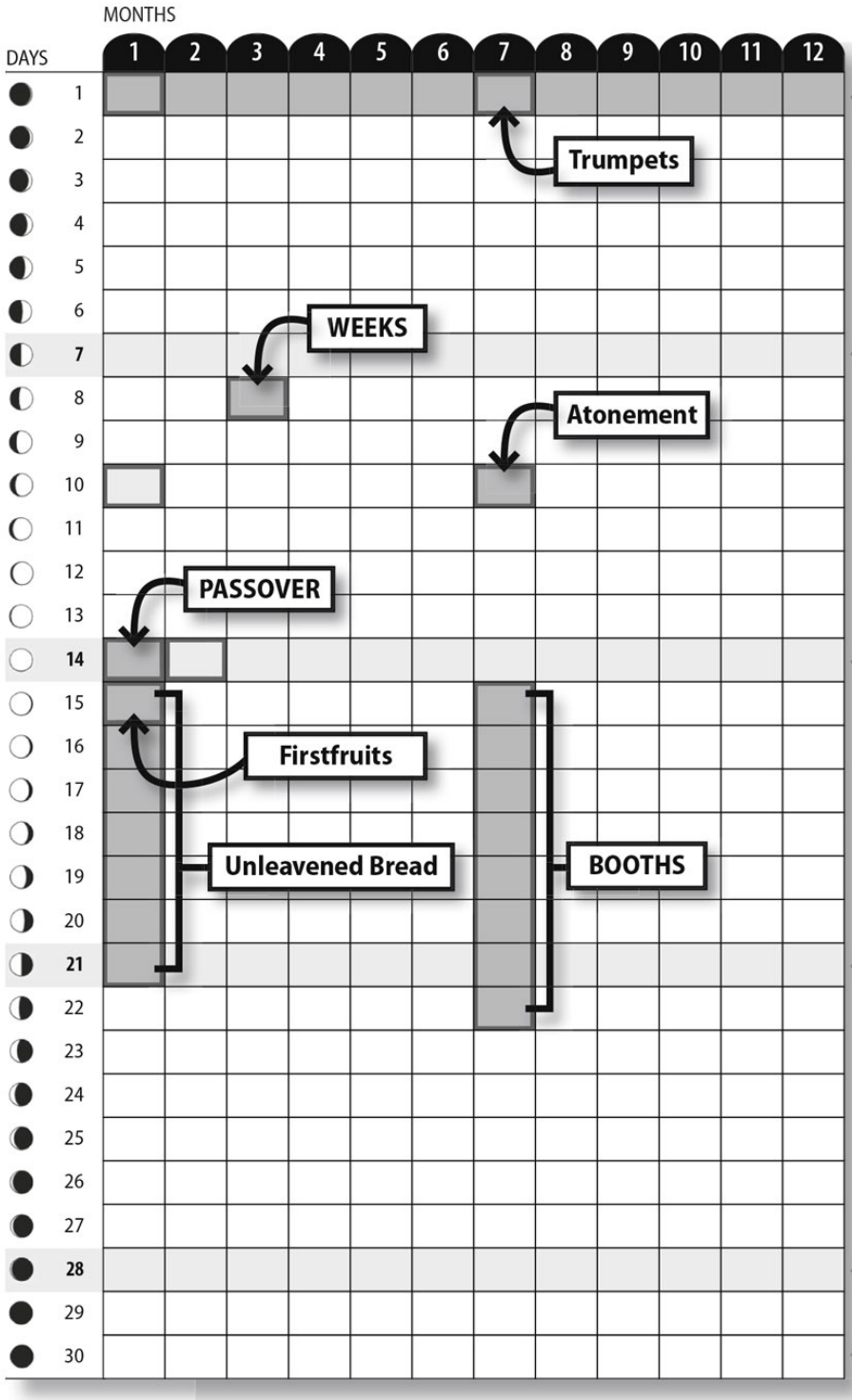
The focus on feasting and the variety of harvests we have discussed in this chapter should not be understood to indicate constant bounty. In fact, the emphasis on feasting as the anticipated mark of God's goodness probably points to the people's longed-for rather than experienced abundance. Diversification of industry was essential for ensuring that enough crops would succeed to make up for those that did not. During most years, some of these fronts would be productive whereas others may produce little. Many households may have had a small field, only a few goats, a single cow, and perhaps a small vineyard. Diversification was an ideal for the sake of survival, and it does not necessarily indicate bounty. Smaller households, or those whose land holdings were conducive only to certain crops or to serve as pasturage, might be compelled to specialize. And while the calendar reflects the dominance of agriculture in Israel, there would be a small percentage of the population whose work entailed urban industries with only minor landholdings in fields outside the city.

Israel's national harvest calendar brought the community together at key points around harvests and established a diversified economy as the ideal. More importantly, the festivals were knit together by the exodus narrative. The story of Israel's exodus from Egypt (Passover), their constitution as a nation at Sinai (Weeks), and their journey to the Promised Land (Booths) provided an overarching religious vision for the people's yearly privilege and duty as heirs of the land. The festivals provided a blend of practical, agricultural structure as well as theological inspiration to govern their stewardship of the land before God. The theological aspect of these festivals helped people to pursue household prosperity with a right heart before God and love for the needy around them. God gave them the land, and it was his blessing alone that would keep them in it.

"If you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later

rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil” (Deut 11:13-14).

Israel’s Calendar of Holy Days



MONTHLY HOLIDAYS

New Moon Day. First day of the month marked by first sighting of the new moon (Num 28:11-15).

Sabbath. Every seventh day (Lev 23:3); perhaps the 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th days of the schematic month (p. 102, n. 23); possibly timed with the phases of the moon for actual months (p. 26-28).

Intercalary day. Extra 30th day added only if needed until sighting of the new moon starts a new month (Num 10:10); schematic month had 30 days (Num 20:29).

ANNUAL HOLIDAYS

1/1 – **New Year's Day.** Beginning the year on the 1st day of the month of the spring equinox (Ex 12:1; Deut 11:12).

1/10 – **Passover Lamb Selection** (Ex 12:3).

1/14 – **Passover** (Lev 23:5).

1/15 – **Firstfruits.** Day when firstfruits of barley was offered (Lev 23:9-14; p. 42-43).

1/15-21 – **Unleavened Bread.** The seven days following Passover (Lev 23:6-8).

2/14 – **Alternate Passover** (Num 9:9-12).

c. 3/8 – **Weeks.** A day seven sabbaths and one day after the date of Firstfruits; firstfruits of wheat was offered at the Feast of Weeks (Lev 23:16).

7/1 – **Trumpets.** Beginning of the 7th month (Lev 23:23-25), the month of the autumnal equinox (Ex 23:16; 34:22).

7/10 – **Day of Atonement.** Assigned to the 10th, but observed with fasting from the evening of the 9th to the evening of the 10th (Lev 23:26-32).

7/15–22 – **Booths.** Observed after the summer harvests were done and before the next year's plantings began (Lev 23:33-43).

Part II

FESTIVALS AND THEIR STORIES



THE FESTIVAL STORIES OF ISRAEL

DATES ARE RARE IN THE PENTATEUCH. In fact, among the countless events in the vast sweep of history contained from Genesis through Deuteronomy, only twenty-one events are given dates.[1] It might seem remarkable that so few stories among so many in the Pentateuch include dates. But this paucity of dates should not surprise us. In fact, what should stir our curiosity is why dates are ascribed to those events that do have them.

Ancient histories did not generally rely on dates to mark the timing of events. They typically used "event sequencing" instead, which is when the timing of one event is indicated by relating it to another.[2] Consider these examples from the book of Genesis:

> To Seth also a son was born. . . . *At that time* people began to call upon the name of the LORD. (Gen 4:26)
>
> *When* man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, [*then*] the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. (Gen 6:1)
>
> *After these things* the word of the LORD came to Abram. (Gen 15:1)

In each of these examples, we are given the timing of an event by relating it to another event—stating that it occurred before, during, or after something else. Ancient historians did not share our modern concept of a single, universal timeline along which to assign dates. Instead, each kingdom had its own counting of years based on the founding of a city or the inauguration of a king. And narratives predominantly conveyed a sense of timing through event sequencing.

Another helpful example is easily seen in the Old Testament books of Kings. With each new king's rise to the throne, we encounter time indicators like these: "In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri began to reign over Israel" and "In the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, . . . Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, began to reign" (1 Kgs 16:29; 2 Kgs 8:16). Notice that when giving the timing for the kings of Israel and Judah, each king's rise is timed by reference to the years his counterpart had been on the throne in the neighboring kingdom. No king's rise is ever given an objective date, but each king's inauguration is timed by reference to his opposite. This is another example of event sequencing.

The difference between these two ways of marking time—the ancient convention of event sequencing versus the modern convention of timeline dating—can be compared with two ways you might give driving instructions to a stranger. If an out-of-towner has no map (and no GPS-enabled smartphone), you would have to give directions by pointing out landmarks: "Head down this street about a hundred yards until you reach a big, brick grocery store. Turn left and go half a mile until you reach the firehouse," and so on. If, however, the visitor has a map—especially one with a reference grid—you can use the grid coordinates to identify any point in the city: "You are currently here at A2, and the place you want to go is there at C7." When you create a map with grid coordinates around its edges, any location can be identified by a universal frame of reference. This is comparable to our modern notion of a universal timeline along which objective dates can be assigned for any event in history. But ancient historians did not share our concept of a universal timeline. Instead, ancient histories indicated the timing of events in a manner more like driving instructions by landmarks. They related the timing of one event by referencing it to another nearby. Event sequencing is the normal method to indicate timing in ancient writings, including the Bible's narratives.[3]

But there are those previously mentioned twenty-one events in the Pentateuch where dates are used.[4] Why are these dates used at all? Once we realize the biblical authors had other methods for indicating temporality, that

realization leads us to suspect there may be special reasons for using dates in connection with certain events.

The first significant attempt to explain the date references in the Pentateuch was the seminal work by Jan van Goudoever.[5] He noted a pervasive interest in Passover dates in the Pentateuch: "Three Passovers are mentioned [by date]. . . . The first Passover, kept in Egypt, in the first year of the Deliverance [Ex 12]. The second Passover, kept in the wilderness, in the second year [Num 9]. The third Passover, kept in the Promised Land, after forty years [Josh 5]."[6] Van Goudoever's observation is significant, but he did not press his insight far enough. I would further argue that the dates in the Pentateuch reveal an interest in the whole festival calendar, not only Passovers. When all of the Pentateuch's twenty-one dates are compiled and plotted over Israel's festival calendar, the congruences are striking (see the calendar at the end of this chapter). Seventeen of the twenty-one fall directly on festival dates. Only four of the Pentateuch's dated events fall outside of festivals,[7] and those four dates are all grouped within the same two-week window at the end of the second month.

Furthermore, all the Pentateuch's dated events occur as part of two major narrative sequences. In the book of Genesis, there are only five dates, and they all appear in the flood narrative (Gen 6–9). There are no dates in Genesis prior to nor after the flood. Similarly, in Exodus there are no dates until Passover night (Ex 12). Then five dates appear in rapid succession in connection with the events of Israel leaving Egypt. And after that, eleven more dates are attached to various stories of Israel's journey to the Promised Land. Dates appear only in connection with these two great "exodus to a new land" stories of the Pentateuch: the flood narrative and the exodus narrative.

It is my thesis that dates are added to certain events for their liturgical remembrance, not as journalistic details. Dates link a historical memory to the specific festivals that later Israel observed. The dates of the festivals are set by the heavenly lights and the naturally occurring seasons and harvests of Canaan (as we saw in chapters one through three). The timing of the festivals are not based on the historical events they commemorate. Rather, the reverse is the case. The historical events are ascribed with the dates of Israel's festivals in order to

associate those memories with later Israel's progress through each year's calendar. Every year Israel "participated" in the ancestral exodus from Egypt by remembering the exodus events in connection with the various phases of their harvests.[8] Neither the flood nor the exodus would likely have occurred within a single year in their actual happening. Nevertheless, in their retelling in the Pentateuch, both the flood deliverance (from the deluge judgment to Noah's altar) and the exodus deliverance (from the angel of death to Moses's tabernacle) are ascribed with dates that fit each redemption story to a single year in Israel's calendar.

This method of assigning dates would be like telling the Christmas story and stating that "Mary laid her baby in a manger on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month." That was not the date on which Jesus was actually born, but the date would associate that memory with the timing of its annual observance (December 25).[9] For certain, modern historical conventions would regard such a saying as inaccurate, hence the sentiment of many scholars that either the Synoptics or John must be "inaccurate" when giving contradictory dates for the crucifixion.[10] But the problem lies not in inaccurate texts but rather our anachronistic expectations about the purpose for an author's giving a date to an event.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will look at each of the twenty-one dated events in the Pentateuch and its festival significance.[11] It is important to demonstrate my assertion that each of the twenty-one dated events has a date that corresponds to the festival calendar of Israel. After we establish this point, the following two chapters (chapters five through six) will seek to demonstrate the other side of the coin: that these dates are not a journalistic record of when those events happened. My thesis is that the Pentateuch uses dates for liturgical instruction, not to provide a journalistic chronology. Event sequencing, not dates, is the Pentateuch's method to indicate chronology.

I have provided a calendar at the end of this chapter that shows where the twenty-one dated events fall in the Hebrew year. You might want to keep a finger in that page for reference as we discuss these dates. Rather than walking through these events in order, it will simplify matters to examine them in groups

according to their dates. We will therefore begin with Israel's New Year's Day, looking at the four events from throughout the Pentateuch that all share a New Year's Day date. Then we will move through other various festival and seasonal groupings from the Hebrew calendar, examining the Pentateuchal events assigned to each in turn.

New Year's Day Events

Four events in the Pentateuch are dated on New Year's Day. The first is in the flood narrative: "In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry" (Gen 8:13-14; no. 4 on the Pentateuch Calendar at the end of this chapter). It is not difficult to see the New Year's relevance of this moment. After experiencing the wickedness of the world and weathering the outpouring of God's wrath, Noah's heart must have throbbed with hope as he looked for the first time on a renewed world before him. Later Hebrews would be stirred to identify with Noah on the first day of each new year, as they too emerged from a rainy season and looked over fields that had been made green again.

The second event with a New Year's date is in the opening verses of Exodus 12, where Israel's departure from Egypt begins: "The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 'This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you'" (Ex 12:1-2; no. 6).[12] After many generations of bondage, the prospect of release from Egypt was a profound "new beginning." That moment of the forefathers' joy was an appropriate inspiration for later Israelites at the beginning of each new year in the land to which God had brought them.

The third event ascribed to New Year's Day is the installation of the tabernacle and its filling with God's glory. "In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected" (Ex 40:17; no. 13. Cf. Num 7:1; 9:15). It is hard to overstate the importance of the tabernacle within the exodus narrative. Nearly half of the entire book of Exodus is devoted

to its design. In fact, it is detailed twice in Exodus: one time as God gave its instructions to Moses on the mountain (Ex 24:15–31:18) and a second time when the people actually built it, part by part (Ex 35:1–39:43). The inauguration of this important structure marked the beginning of Israel's system of worship, and its ascription with a New Year's Day date brings that memory to mind at the start of every new year as the sanctuary's festivals of worship restarted.

The fourth event given a New Year's date is reported late in the book of Numbers. This passage does not explicitly mention the first *day* of the first month, but it gives a first-month date. "And the people of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh. And Miriam died there and was buried there" (Num 20:1; no. 18). The people's arrival at Kadesh and the death of Miriam marked an important transition in the story of the book of Numbers.

The book of Numbers is structured around two generations (cf. its two censuses, Num 1:1–4:49; 26:1-65). The older generation became the epitome of rebellion against God. Even though they saw God's mighty works in Egypt, that generation proved to be "stubborn and rebellious" (Ps 78:8; cf. Num 14:11). Their example is presented as a warning not to be stubborn and unbelieving like them (Ps 78:1-22). In contrast, the younger generation that emerges at the end of the book of Numbers is presented as a model of faithfulness worthy of imitation.[13] Within that overarching storyline in Numbers, the people's arrival at Kadesh at the end of their forty years of wandering and the death of Miriam mark a turning point. The people were ready to begin their final approach to the land, and Miriam's death started the transition of the older generation to the younger. Ascribing the arrival at Kadesh and the death of Miriam to New Year's time brings that message of generational transition to bear on each New Year's Day thereafter. This date reference carries into every succeeding generation the call to enter the new year in faithfulness, leaving behind the wilderness rebellion of the forefathers to (re)enter the land in obedience.

Each of these dated New Year's events is a fitting heritage for later Israelites to remember as they celebrated New Year's Day.

Passover and Unleavened Bread Events

There are seven events in the Pentateuch dated on Passover and the beginning of Unleavened Bread. Notably, every one of these seven events is an actual festival story or activity. The first four are from the original Passover and Unleavened Bread days when Israel was brought out of Egypt:

1. God appointed the tenth day of the first month to select lambs for the Passover sacrifice (Ex 12:3; no. 7).

2. The Passover meal was eaten on the fourteenth day of the first month (Ex 12:6; no. 8).

3. The unleavened bread of the exodus generation was memorialized in a weeklong observance for later Israel, from the evening of the fourteenth day to the twenty-first day in the first month (Ex 12:14-20; no. 9).

4. On "this day . . . in the month of Abib" when Israel left Egypt, Moses instructed them to eat unleavened bread, and he prescribed future observance of the same instruction (Ex 13:3-4; no. 10).

All four of these dates appear in the Passover event narrative in Exodus 12–13.

There are no dates in the book of Exodus prior to Passover night. In Exodus 12:1-2, the Passover story begins with the book's first calendar instruction: "This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you" (Ex 12:2, considered previously under the New Year's Day events). Then the entire date-laden Passover narrative follows, using alternating voices that switch between instruction for the present audience and instruction for future audiences.

For example, in Exodus 12:3-13 God speaks to the people of Moses' generation: "Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb." Then, in verses 14-20, the Lord speaks to later generations: "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast." This pattern of alternating address continues back and forth, as shown in the following table.

Ref.	Date (M | D)		Passover Night Instruction	Passover Rite Instruction
12:1:1-2	01			The month of the exodus is to be the first month of the year.
12:3-12	01 01	10 14	Select lambs for Passover. Offer the Passover sacrifice and eat the Passover meal.	
12:14-20	01	15–21		Liturgical instructions for keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
12:21-23	[01]	[14]	Put sacrifice blood over door.	
12:24-28				Observe this rite in all generations, teaching its meaning to your children.
12:29-41	[01]	[14–15]	That night ("at midnight," v. 29), the Lord struck Egypt, so that Egypt urgently compelled Israel to leave (i.e., predawn and into the fifteenth).	
12:42-50	[01]	[14]		"So this same night is . . . kept to the LORD . . . throughout their generations."
12:51–13:2	[01]	[15]	The Lord brought them out and told Moses to consecrate all Israel's firstborn to him.	
13:3-16	01	[15–21]		Instructions for keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Canaan (vv. 3-10) and the consecration to the Lord of every firstborn born in Canaan (vv. 11-16).

Figure 4.1 Passover night instruction and Passover rite instruction

This pattern makes plain that the Passover narrative is more than a historical record. It is a historical narrative written for the liturgical instruction of later generations. We are accustomed to finding ritual instructions in the form of statutes (e.g., the book of Leviticus). But the Passover pericope shows how historical narratives can also be an effective genre for communicating festival instructions (cf. Ex 12:25-27; 13:8-10, 12-16). It is my contention that Exodus 12–13 introduces this back-and-forth pattern to indicate that the entire exodus narrative is to be read as such guidance for later festival observances.

The Passover narrative is teaching us a reading strategy as we enter into the entire series of journey narratives leaving Egypt and heading to the Promised Land. Israel's annual festival calendar—from Passover to Booths—was a liturgical repetition of that journey that every generation of Israel undertook year by year. The Pentateuch provided Israel with these narratives in order to instruct them on how to keep the festivals. These historical narratives include dates in order to link certain stories to the seasonally timed festivals of Israel, thereby enlivening their faith as participants in the same heritage and as stewards of the very land to which God was delivering their forefathers. Ascribing dates at key points throughout these histories, beginning with Passover night, is an important part of that guidance.

Three more Passover dates are mentioned in the Pentateuch, all of which occur in the book of Numbers. Two of these dates are from the first observance of liturgical Passover at the newly minted tabernacle, one year after the original Passover event. The last is a reference back to the original Passover night:

1. On the fourteenth day of the first month, on the year after the exodus (year two), Moses led Israel in their first liturgical celebration of Passover (Num 9:1-3; no. 15).

2. During that first liturgical celebration of Passover, "certain men . . . were unclean" and unable to participate. Therefore, Moses appointed an alternate

Passover on the fourteenth day of the second month (Num 9:6, 11; no. 16).

3. In Moses' review of Israel's journeys, the date of the departure from Egypt (the fifteenth day of the first month) is repeated (Num 33:3; no. 19).

The tabernacle was brand new and had been completed in time for the first month of the year after Israel had left Egypt. Its first use was for a Passover remembrance exactly one year after the original Passover night. Describing how Moses and the exodus generation—the same congregation who had experienced "the real thing"—celebrated the first ritual Passover at the tabernacle would help to authenticate the sanctuary liturgy of later generations on that same date. For those unable to participate because of unavoidable ritual impurity, there was great comfort in the dated account of an alternate Passover (on 2/14) instituted by Moses in Numbers 9:6-12. Knowing that Moses had officiated the first alternate Passover gave assurance to later participants in the alternate Passover date, that to do so was legitimate before God.

The seven Passover and Unleavened Bread dates are all explicitly associated with Passover and Unleavened Bread observance lessons.

Feast of Weeks Event

Only one event specifically dates to the Feast of Weeks: "In the third month after the people of Israel went out from the land of Egypt, on that day [*bayyôm hazzeh*] they came to the wilderness of Sinai" (Ex 19:1, a.t.). The way the date is described in this passage has long puzzled scholars. The text says that they arrived at Mount Sinai "on that day" in the third month. On what day? There is no antecedent for the phrase "that day" provided in the text. Several solutions have been proposed for this puzzle.

Some speculate that the original text included a day number, but that the day number was lost in copies made by later scribes. Maybe the original said something like "On *the first day of* the third month [*bəʾeḥād laḥōdeš haššəlîšî*] . . . on that day they came to the wilderness of Sinai" (cf. Num 1:1) or "On the new moon day of the third month [*bəyôm haḥōdeš haššəlîšî*] . . . on that day they came to the wilderness of Sinai" (cf. Ezek 46:1).[14] There is no textual

evidence, however, for such an omission. Another attempted explanation proposes that "on the third moon" means "on the third new moon *day*." However, Hebrew normally includes the word *day* when speaking about the first day of a new moon. Otherwise the term *moon* refers to the whole month.[15] Still other scholars suggest that the expression *on that day* should be translated "in that time," pointing to the third month generally rather than indicating a specific day (cf. Gen 2:4; Ps 20:1; 137:7; Is 9:4; Ezek 30:9). However, another possibility seems more likely.

The best explanation, in my view, is that this peculiar wording is precisely the way the author would need to write the date in order to ascribe this event to the Feast of Weeks. After all, the Feast of Weeks was always a specific day early in the third month, but the exact date "floated" from year to year. Rather than assigning the Feast of Weeks to, say, the fourteenth day of the month or the tenth day of the month, the timing of this festival was determined by counting. "You shall count seven full weeks . . . from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering [i.e., the Feast of Firstfruits]. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath" (Lev 23:15-16). The Feast of Weeks was the only pilgrimage festival that had a certain month in which it always occurred but a varying day in that month on which it might fall. Therefore, the only way in which the author of Exodus could assign an event to that specific festival date would be to ascribe it to "that day" in "the third month."[16] The audience is expected to understand the Feast of Weeks as "that day" which was observed in the third month. A notable comparison can be found in the festival calendar in Numbers 28:16–29:40. In that calendar, each of the festivals is identified by its specific date (28:16; 29:1, 7, 12). The exception is the Feast of Weeks, which is simply called "the day [*bayyôm*] of the [wheat] firstfruits" (28:26). It is the only festival in that list without a specific day number ascribed to it, since it was a "floating" date in the third month.

If this explanation is correct, then this unusual way for stating the date of Israel's arrival at Sinai supports my thesis regarding the liturgical (rather than journalistic) purpose of these dates. If the author wanted to preserve the specific day on which the people actually arrived at Mount Sinai, he could have readily

given a day number. If the author did not want to record the date of their arrival, he could have avoided any reference to "that day" on which they arrived. However, the author does want us to identify this event with a specific day ("that day" of the third month) yet without providing further precision regarding its number. This elaborate construction for the date in Exodus 19:1 suggests that the author's intention is to link the event's memory to the Feast of Weeks regardless of the day on which it falls in the time of its reading.[17] The arrival at Sinai appears to be assigned to the "floating" date for the Feast of Weeks, thereby expecting later Hebrews to remember Sinai during their wheat firstfruits celebration on "that day" in the third month.

Indeed, readers of the Exodus 19 narrative—from *Jubilees* to the Dead Sea Scrolls and in other early Jewish traditions—have long understood the date's referent to be the Feast of Weeks.[18] It has also been customary to regard the narrative's emphasis on God's covenant with the people as defining the central theological feature of the annual festival to be "covenant renewal." We find this emphasis in the instructions given on that original third month assembly at Sinai:

> The LORD called to [Moses] . . . saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession." (Ex 19:3-5)[19]

Notice how God calls the people to recognize the firstfruits of his care for them already experienced ("how I bore you on eagles' wings"; cf. Ex 20:1-2) as the basis for engaging them to keep his covenant and obey him. This pattern reflects the history of Passover preceding Sinai. It also fits the agricultural cadence of Israel's festival year, with the people gathering for the Feast of Weeks, since the firstfruits of the grain harvests are already in hand. With these firstfruits of God's blessing already received, the Feast of Weeks would be a time to renew the people's covenant with God as their king, to obey his laws, and to seek his blessing through the continuing labor of the summer and autumn months.

There is only one Weeks celebration example in later Old Testament texts, and it is notably a covenant renewal gathering. Second Chronicles 15:10-12

reports, “They were gathered at Jerusalem in the third month [i.e., the Feast of Weeks] . . . And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul.”[20] The memory of Sinai at the Feast of Weeks would serve as an annual setting to renew devotion to God’s covenant law as those who have already received the firstfruits of his grace.

Feast of Booths Dates

Only one event in the Pentateuch is assigned to the seventh month. It is in the flood narrative: “In the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat” (Gen 8:4; no. 2). The seventeenth day of that month is at the center of later Israel’s weeklong Feast of Booths.

Booths was the climax of Israel’s festival year. It recalled the safety and care that God gave to his people on their journey through the wilderness, successfully delivering them to the Promised Land. Leviticus gives this reason for the booths the people built for themselves during this festival: “You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Lev 23:42-43).[21] That God “made the people of Israel dwell in booths” was a mark of his care. He sheltered them and cared for them. He did not leave them vulnerable but rather caused them to have protection on their journey. In fact, he himself “dwelt” in a booth (the tabernacle) along with them on their journey. In addition to reminding God’s people of his faithfulness to them in successfully carrying them to the Promised Land, the Feast of Booths celebrates the same care that was foreshadowed by Noah’s arrival at Mount Ararat. God had safely carried Noah through his watery “wilderness” to the mountain where he thanked God by building an altar to worship (Gen 8:20).

It is interesting that there are no other events from the exodus narrative that are dated to the Feast of Booths. One possible reason for this is that the Pentateuch ends with Israel poised on the border but not actually settled in the land. The original Passover was finished, and the original reception of God’s law

(Feast of Weeks) had happened. But the settlement hopes held forth in the Feast of Booths had not yet been completed. Until Israel settled the land and established a temple on Mount Zion,[22] the Feast of Booths lacked a completed historical precedent.[23] However, the history of Noah offered a primitive precedent. That ancient holy man's exodus story provided an earlier narrative that worshipers could recall during the Feast of Booths for assurance of a successful outcome.

New Moon Days

The first day of every month was a new moon day in Israel, which was like a "bonus" sabbath. It was a monthly day of rest in addition to the weekly sabbaths (2 Chron 2:4; Ezek 46:1-6; Amos 8:5). Four events in the Pentateuch took place on a new moon day.[24]

The first occurs in the flood narrative: "The waters [of the flood] continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen" (Gen 8:5; no. 3). From that point, Noah began to send birds from the ark "to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground" (Gen 8:8). This continued until several weeks later when "the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth" (Gen 8:11).

The tenth month is at the precise center of Israel's planting season. It is three months after the seventh-month autumn harvests ended and three months before the first-month spring harvests began. Israel's plantings would likely be finished by the tenth month, and the people would be watching the crops begin to sprout to see whether God would give new life to the ground. Noah's first glimpse of land and the plucking of its first leaves fits well with Israel's yearly experience at that same season.

The second new moon date in the Pentateuch is the beginning point of the book of Numbers: "The LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after

they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, 'Take a census'" (Num 1:1-2, 18; no. 14). Exodus had reported the people's trek to Sinai. Leviticus had recorded laws given at Sinai. It is the book of Numbers that describes the people's journey—its failures and successes—from Sinai to the border of the Promised Land. It is significant that the book begins with an assurance of the entire camp's enrollment by house into the community of God's tabernacle to travel under his care (cf. Num 2:1-34). That assurance is aligned with the second new moon day of Israel's festival calendar. This is the new moon day following Passover, when the people annually remembered God's deliverance out of Egypt. The subsequent new moon day fits as a reminder of God's mindfulness of each house as the year's "journey" is under way.

The third and fourth events with new moon dates are the deaths of Aaron and Moses. Their older sister Miriam had died, as previously noted, on the first new moon day (i.e., New Year's Day) of Israel's fortieth year since leaving Egypt. Aaron (the second born of the three) died on the new moon day of the fifth month that same year (Num 33:38, no. 20; cf. Num 20:22-29). Finally, Moses gathered the people on the new moon day of the eleventh month, preached to them the book of Deuteronomy, and then climbed Mount Nebo "that very day" to die (Deut 1:3; 32:48-50; no. 21). It is striking that the Pentateuch provides death dates for all three siblings of Israel's "founding family" coming out of Egypt. And all three occurred on new moon days spread through the same year.

Aaron's death and that of Moses are six months apart. Aaron's occurred at the midpoint of Israel's summertime. The fifth-month new moon day is two months after the Feast of Weeks (the third month) and two months before the Feast of Booths (the seventh month). The death of Moses is ascribed to the new moon day six months later, two months before the Feast of Passover. Van Goudoever proposed that this timing is significant of preparing for Passover.[25] More likely, all three prophet siblings are identified with new moon day memorials spread through the year as settings to remember their faithfulness and examples to the mothers,[26] priests, and fathers of Israel.

Second-Month Events

All the dates we have looked at so far have been directly aligned with festivals. Every one of the aforementioned dates occurs exactly on one or another of Israel's holy days. But four of the Pentateuch's dated events appear to be exceptions to this pattern. However, they are all assigned to the same two-week window in the second month. They include the following:

1. On the fifteenth day of the second month after leaving Egypt, God began to give the people manna (Ex 16:1; no. 11).

2. On the seventeenth day of the second month, the waters broke loose to begin Noah's flood (Gen 7:11; no. 1).

3. The congregation of Israel began their journey from Mount Sinai on the twentieth day of the second month (Num 10:11; no. 17).

4. The ground was finally completely dry after Noah's flood on the twenty-seventh day of the second month (Gen 8:14; no. 5).

The significance of this second-month window is its centrality between the two spring (grain) harvest festivals. Firstfruits (in the first month) marked the beginning of the grain harvest. Weeks (in the third month) marked the other end of the grain harvest.

Israel's first week collecting manna (Ex 16:1-36) is a particularly interesting fit for this spot in the calendar. The manna narrative is a lesson on sabbath-keeping. The people were taught to collect manna six days, with a double portion on the sixth day in order to rest from gathering on the seventh. While this pattern was for Israel's instruction all through the year, it is suitably dated to the heart of Israel's grain harvesting season. The analogy between gathering manna and gathering grain would make that lesson poignant in its second-month memorial.

According to Genesis, the flood waters first began during the second month (on the seventeenth day), and the ground was completely dry exactly one year and an even ten days later (on the twenty-seventh day). Locating these events at the center point of the grain harvest is agriculturally significant. The rainy

season in Canaan occurred between the autumn and the spring, and the grain harvest took place during the return of dry weather in the spring (cf. 2 Sam 21:10). It was normal for the Jordan River to flood its banks during the grain harvest due to the winter rainfall on the surrounding hills and mountains (Josh 3:15), but an unseasonal heavy rainfall during the grain harvest could damage the field crops. In fact, a thunderstorm during grain harvest was regarded as a sign of God's judgment, as illustrated in the days of Samuel: "Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the LORD, that he may send thunder and rain. And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great" (1 Sam 12:17-18; cf. Ex 9:31-32; Prov 26:1). The flood's start date draws on the fear of God's judgment on a year's harvests as indicated by storms in the grain season, while the flood's end date points to the comforts of his mercy when the ground is properly drying out during the grain season.

The other second-month date points to Israel's departure from Sinai. "In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the testimony, and the people of Israel set out by stages from the wilderness of Sinai. . . . They set out for the first time at the command of the LORD" (Num 10:11-13). This departure date at the center of the spring grain harvests would associate the previous journey from Egypt to Sinai (remembered during this same period between Passover and Weeks) with this next, more exciting journey from Sinai to the Promised Land, the completion of which would be celebrated at the Feast of Booths in the seventh month. This Sinai departure date serves to assure Israel that the same blessing that successfully delivered them to Sinai will also carry them to Zion.

Conclusion

We have now looked at every single dated event in the Pentateuch! It is remarkable to be able to say that. But there are only a handful of them. Within historical narratives covering millennia—from Adam and Noah to Moses and Joshua—only twenty-one events have dates on them. In this chapter, I have endeavored to provide plausible reasons why each of those memories were

attached to specific festival-aligned dates. The Pentateuch uses event sequencing to provide chronology for its narratives. Dates are not normally used for that purpose in ancient texts. When the Pentateuch uses dates, they are attached in order to highlight a link between the historical event retold and a particular festival when that event would be remembered by later Israel.[27] Dates are by no means the only way to highlight those links. But where dates occur, they serve this liturgical purpose.

Our focus in the chapter has been on months and days, but there is also an interesting pattern in the years attached to events in the exodus narrative. Events assigned to the first year of the exodus are all "original" events: the original Passover night and Unleavened Bread escape, the original Sinai event, and so forth. Events assigned to the second year were all inaugural tabernacle-centered events: installation of the tabernacle, the first tabernacle Passover, the first alternate Passover, and so forth. There are no dates assigned to anything between the second year and the fortieth. The only other dates are introduced in connection with the fortieth year, which is the end of the exodus generation: the deaths of Miriam, Aaron, and Moses. The forty-first year, then, is picked up by Joshua with the new generation's ritual observances on their first year in the new land: the settlement generation crossed the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month of the forty-first year (the day when Passover lambs were traditionally selected; Josh 4:19); they celebrated the first Passover in the Promised Land on the fourteenth of the first month that forty-first year (Josh 5:10); and the people ate the firstfruits of the land (and the manna ceased) beginning on the fifteenth of the first month (the date of the Firstfruits Festival). Thus, the year assignments further support a liturgical interest rather than an interest in historical data.

It is also noteworthy that both dated stories—the flood narrative and the exodus journey—are sanctuary stories. It has often been noted that the dimensions and features of Noah's ark identify it as a floating "temple."[28] If this is correct, both of these stories feature the construction of a mobile sanctuary that carries God's people through a barren wilderness to a new land of bounty, where a mountaintop altar is (to be) constructed for worship. The meta-story behind these two Pentateuchal histories and the annual festival calendar of Israel

are one. Dates serve to link those two “temple inauguration” histories to the annual worship festivals of later Israel.

The importance of this insight is liturgical. It indicates that the Pentateuch’s narratives are designed as texts for worshipers (not strictly historians). Israel’s calendar was “read” in the skies, “told” in their calendar narratives, and practiced in their patterns of labor and worship. Through the festival calendar and these festival-dated narratives, Israel was taught to identify with the faith lessons of their heritage in cadence with the agricultural seasons of the land. Worship provided guidance for stewardship of the land in faithfulness and fruitfulness. Jan van Goudoever’s basic insight about the dates in the Pentateuch is correct: “The Torah *is* a Passover-story.”[29] But the significance is more comprehensive than Van Goudoever recognized.

Pentateuch Calendar

Every dated event in the Pentateuch listed (below) and charted (right).

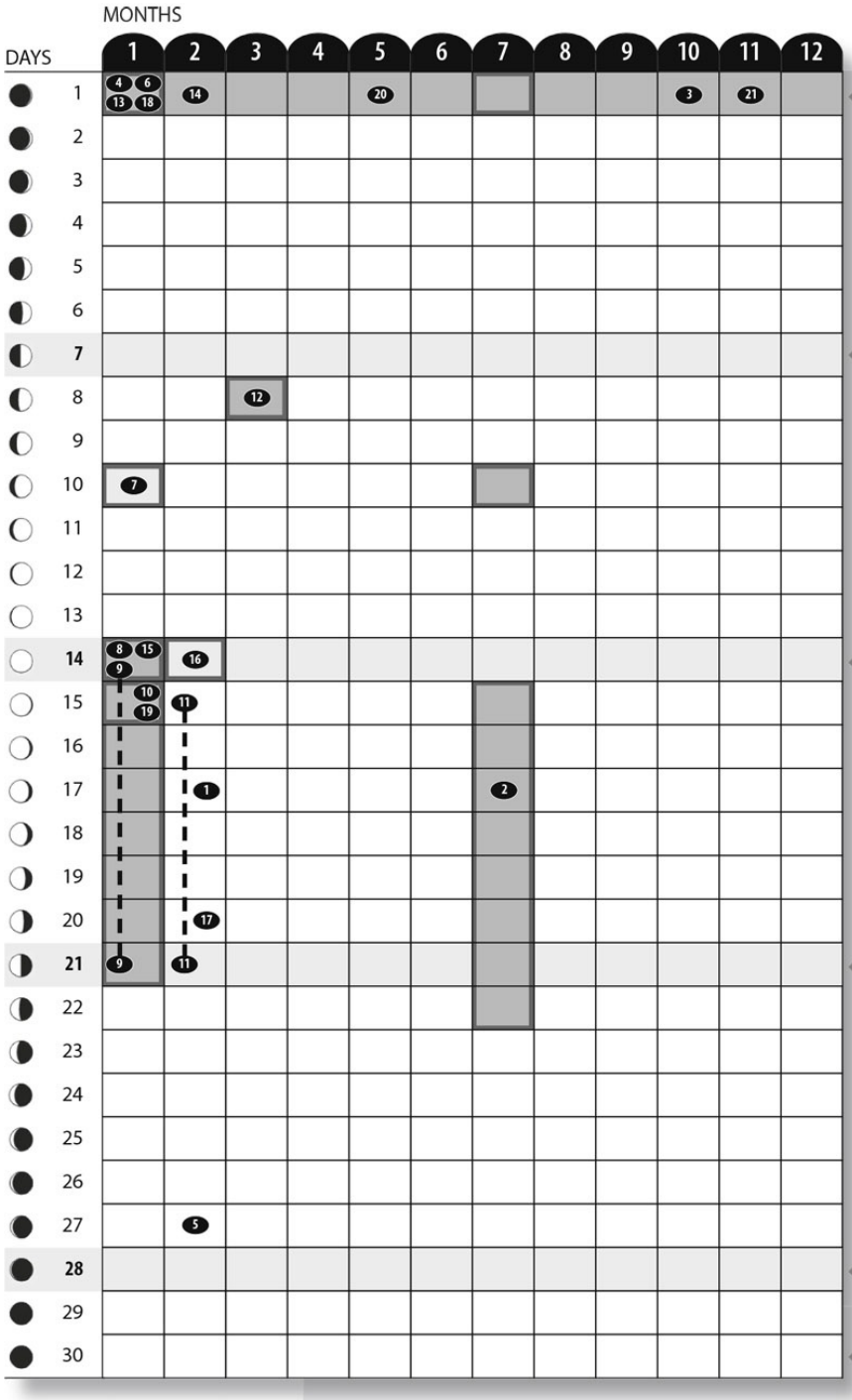
	Month	Day	Year	Event	Reference
1	2	17	600*	Flooding of the world begins	Gen 7:11
2	7	17	[600]	Ark comes to rest	Gen 8:4
3	10	1	[600]	Mountaintops become visible	Gen 8:5
4	1	1	601	Waters finish receding	Gen 8:13
5	2	27	601	The ground is dry	Gen 8:14
6	1	[1]	[1]†	Month of exodus appointed as start of the year	Ex 12:2
7	1	10	[1]	Day to select Passover lamb	Ex 12:3
8	1	14	[1]	Passover sacrifice meal conducted	Ex 12:6
9	1	14-21		Unleavened bread to be observed	Ex 12:18
10	1	[15]	[1]	Day of departure from Egypt remembered	Ex 13:3-4
11	2	15-21	[1]	Manna to be gathered each day, except the 7th	Ex 16:1
12	3	[c.8]	[1]	Arrival at Mount Sinai	Ex 19:1
13	1	1	2	Tabernacle erected	Ex 40:1, 18
14	2	1	2	Moses to conducts a census	Num 1:1, 17
15	1	14	2	First tabernacle Passover observed	Num 9:1-3
16	2	14	[2]	Alternate Passover appointed and observed	Num 9:11
17	2	20	2	Israel leaves Mount Sinai for Paran	Num 10:11
18	1	1	[?]	Israel leaves Paran	Num 20:1
19	1	15	[1]	Israel left Egypt	Num 33:3
20	5	1	40	Aaron died on Mount Hor	Num 33:38
21	11	1	40	Moses addresses the people on Canaan's border	Deut 1:3

**Years for the flood events are the years of Noah's life.*

† Years for the exodus events are the years of Israel's exit from Egypt.

The events listed by number above correspond to the dates marked by the same numbers on the facing calendar page. (The event numbers are in black circles; e.g. 1.) The gray blocks on the calendar at the right (e.g., ▭) indicate holy days of the Hebrew year.

of the Hebrew year.



MONTHLY HOLIDAYS

New Moon Day. First day of the month marked by first sighting of the new moon (Num 28:11-15).

Sabbath. Every seventh day (Lev 23:3); perhaps the 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th days of the schematic month (p. 102, n. 23); possibly timed with the phases of the moon for actual months (p. 26-28).

Intercalary day. Extra 30th day added only if needed until sighting of the new moon starts a new month (Num 10:10); schematic month had 30 days (Num 20:29).

ANNUAL HOLIDAYS

1/1 – **New Year's Day.** Beginning the year on the 1st day of the month of the spring equinox (Ex 12:1; Deut 11:12).

1/10 – **Passover Lamb Selection** (Ex 12:3).

1/14 – **Passover** (Lev 23:5).

1/15 – **Firstfruits.** Day when firstfruits of barley was offered (Lev 23:9-14; p. 42-43).

1/15-21 – **Unleavened Bread.** The seven days following Passover (Lev 23:6-8).

2/14 – **Alternate Passover** (Num 9:9-12).

c. 3/8 – **Weeks.** A day seven sabbaths and one day after the date of Firstfruits; firstfruits of wheat was offered at the Feast of Weeks (Lev 23:16).

7/1 – **Trumpets.** Beginning of the 7th month (Lev 23:23-25), the month of the autumnal equinox (Ex 23:16; 34:22).

7/10 – **Day of Atonement.** Assigned to the 10th, but observed with fasting from the evening of the 9th to the evening of the 10th (Lev 23:26-32).

7/15–22 – **Booths.** Observed after the summer harvests were done and before the next year's plantings began (Lev 23:33-43).



DATES FOR REMEMBERING

THE EVIDENCE ASSEMBLED IN THE PREVIOUS chapters brings us to an important question: How are we to relate the Pentateuch's date assignments based on *nature* to the same assignments based on *history*? For example, Passover was assigned to the fourteenth day in the first month. This date coincides with the full moon of the spring equinox in Canaan and the start of the barley harvest in that land (that is, it has a *natural* basis for its timing). But it is also the night Israel left Egypt (its *historical* basis).

Did God supernaturally guide the timing of the various events of Noah's flood and of Moses' exodus (like Passover night) to match with the agricultural cadences of the Promised Land? Did God sovereignly cause *history* to unfold in Egypt and in Noah's homeland on cadences that would correlate with the *natural* climate of Canaan for the sake of Israel's eventual settlement there? In earlier chapters in this book, I have shown the natural basis for these dates. In the present and following chapters, I will endeavor to show that these events historically occurred on different dates and that the Pentateuch does not suggest God caused them actually to occur on these Canaan-aligned dates. Rather, new dates were assigned in the narratives to realign those memories with the agrarian cadences of labor and celebration in Canaan. The dates are added to these events as guidance for Israel's celebration and with no intention to preserve their original occurrence timing. In principle, this should not seem unusual since we do it all the time with the dates assigned for modern holidays. Consider several modern examples.

Scheduling Modern Holidays

Each year, Americans celebrate Veterans Day on November 11. That date was chosen because World War I hostilities ended on November 11, 1918, when the armistice with Germany went into effect.[1] Veterans Day is observed on the actual date of the event it was originally appointed to honor. In this case, the event's "observance date" is the same as its original "occurrence date." But that is unusual. Remarkably, very few holidays are observed on the actual dates of the events they memorialize. In fact, in America, most public holidays are assigned to a date based on seasonal or workweek practicalities rather than retaining the original event date.

Christmas commemorates the day Jesus was born, yet its assignment to December 25 is based on the winter solstice rather than any evidence that Jesus was actually born that day.[2] On Thanksgiving Day, Americans typically remember the historic three-day harvest festival shared by Pilgrims and Native Americans in 1621. According to James Baker, a researcher with Plimoth Plantation, the actual event took place sometime "between Sept. 21 and Nov. 11, 1621, with the most likely time being around . . . Sept. 29."[3] But Americans today continue this heritage of national Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday of November. George Washington was born on February 22, 1732. But the holiday to remember his birth (called Washington's Birthday or President's Day) is assigned to the third Monday of February each year. This timing ensures American workers can enjoy a three-day weekend. As a result, Washington's Birthday can fall on any date between February 15 and 21, but ironically it never falls on his actual birthday!

It is quite common to celebrate a holiday on an observance date that differs from the paradigm event's occurrence date. This would be especially important in agrarian societies, where holidays "belong" at harvest times. It is simply not feasible to call for a feast at a time when food supplies are sparse or when people are overwhelmed with urgent field work. Harvests are the natural times for festivals. The modern practice of assigning observance dates based on economic or agricultural cadences rather than historical chronology is also the norm with

ancient holy dates. And this is demonstrably the case with the narrative dates in the Pentateuch. In the remainder of this chapter, we will look at evidence that the Pentateuch never expects its readers to take its twenty-one event dates as their original occurrence dates. Then, in the next chapter, we will look at the legal and literary techniques that are transparently at work behind the Pentateuch's date assignments.

The Chronology of the Pentateuch

One of the most compelling reasons to view the Pentateuch's dates as "observance dates" and not original "occurrence dates," is because they *work* as observance dates but do not work as occurrence dates. We have already explored the former point. In the previous chapter, we saw how the dated events of the Pentateuch fit with the agricultural calendar of later Israel. The twenty-one dated events all coincide with festivals (and, in a few exceptions, at the midpoint between the grain festivals) of ancient Israel. The dates work as observance dates. But we should further note that the dates do not work as actual occurrence dates—and it can be demonstrated that the compiler of the Pentateuch never intended for them to provide a journalistic chronology.

If a person were to announce that she spent July 4th last year in Washington DC, and then spent Christmas Day the same year in Bethlehem, the relevance of those date-and-place alignments is evident. But if this person also wrote about *ten months* of travel in between those two dates (which are less than six months apart), you would recognize the need for an explanation. The Pentateuch contains many such chronological idiosyncrasies that have been widely recognized in scholarly discussions of the texts. Critical scholars note these "problems" and frequently conclude that the Pentateuch is a pastiche from various sources, whose differing dates and timing indicators were not smoothed out. For example, Jan van Goudoever's study of the Pentateuch's dates led him to conclude, "From such conflicting indications it is clear that the 'calendar' in the Torah is not consistent. There are either different traditions, which are not harmonized, or some alterations were made by writers or redactors which

disturbed a ‘calendar’ which was originally consistent.”[4] But there is another explanation: the dates are not supposed to provide a historical chronology of actual occurrence timing.[5] They are provided strictly to align key historical memories to the observance dates of Israel’s festival calendar.

This point can be demonstrated through a catalogue of the “incongruities” that emerge when Pentateuchal dates are assembled as a chronology. What follows is a survey of some of that evidence. These examples are not provided to poke at the Pentateuch but rather to expose the inappropriateness of reading its dates anachronistically as journalistic chronology.

Flood Dates

Genesis dates the start of the flood to the second month of the year (Gen 7:11). Once “the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened” (Gen 7:11), the waters increased rapidly. Even “the high mountains” were covered within forty days (Gen 7:17-20). The flood “prevailed” for five months (Gen 7:24–8:4), finally draining into the soil between the seventh month and the end of the year. The waters were gone by the first day of the new year (Gen 8:13), and the soil was completely dry by the end of the second month—just one year after the flood began (Gen 8:14). It is stunning that such a massive amount of water could come and go, and that the ground could be dried out, all within a single year! This was a divine act of mind-boggling proportions, mapped over the course of one agricultural year—from one springtime to the next.

However, the most striking indication that the author *intends* for us to see observance dates in this calendar—and *not* occurrence dates—is in the math. The text counts exactly five months between the beginning of the flood (the seventeenth day of the second month; Gen 7:11) and the ark’s landing on Mount Ararat (the seventeenth day of the seventh month; Gen 8:4). Twice the account calculates those five months as being 150 days (Gen 7:24; 8:3). That means the author is working from a calendar that has 30 days per month (5 months × 30 days = 150 days). There is only one kind of calendar in the ancient world that is

known to have ascribed 30 days to every month. This calculation is *prima facie* evidence that the author of Genesis was using what scholars call a schematic calendar.[6]

In the ancient world, a schematic calendar was used to compose economic and legal texts. When scribes recorded the chronology of events as they happened, the dates were based on actual lunar months, which varied in length between twenty-nine and thirty days. If the writer of Genesis was reporting actual occurrence dates as Noah experienced and recorded them, the number of days between the seventeenth of the second month and the seventeenth of the seventh month would have been 147 or 148 days at most. As discussed in a previous chapter, months (moons) varied in length between twenty-nine and thirty days. Within the span of five months, at least two and maybe three months would be twenty-nine days long. It is not possible for five actual months (moons) in a row to have thirty days. The flood account cannot be based on occurrence dates. But ancient scribes are known to have used schematic calendars with "ideal" thirty-day months when running economic forecasts or drafting legal texts. That would include calendars prepared to guide religious observance.[7]

The calculations given by the author of the flood account indicate that he was using festival observance dates and not actual event occurrence dates. Furthermore, he was not hiding that fact. Indeed, the text's open use of thirty-day months combined with the measurement of all other blocks of time in the story with round units of seven days (Gen 7:10; 8:10, 12) and forty days/nights (Gen 7:4, 12, 17; 8:6) indicates the presence of a literary calendar and the expectation the reader would recognize it. The flood narrative is the only account in the entire book of Genesis that has dates, and the reason for those dates is to align this "primeval exodus story" with later Israel's festival exodus remembrances. The flood dates demonstrably cannot be actual occurrence dates.

Journey to Sinai

Another striking example is found in the account of Israel's journey to Sinai. Normally, when observance dates are introduced, the original occurrence dates are not given. But remarkably, the book of Exodus retains both the actual timing of Israel's journey to Sinai as well as its festival observance timing. And the two are not the same.

The actual timing for that journey is reported three times in the story, with the first timing report being stated at the burning bush. Moses turned aside to see the burning bush while tending sheep along the slopes of Sinai (Ex 3:1-3). In that encounter, God instructed Moses to return to Egypt, to tell Pharaoh to let Israel go, and to bring the people "three days' journey into the wilderness" back to Mount Sinai (Ex 3:18). "Three days" may be a round calculation, encompassing slightly more or less than three actual days, but in either case it refers to a fairly short journey.[8] On three separate occasions, the journey to Mount Sinai is reported to have been a "three days' journey" from Egypt (see also Ex 5:3; 8:27).

However, once Israel actually left Egypt, the dates assigned to that pilgrimage span three months. They departed on the fifteenth day of the first month (Passover; Ex 12:6, 29; Num 33:3) and arrived seven weeks later in the third month (Weeks; Ex 19:1). How are we to understand this "discrepancy"? Various attempts have been made to explain it,[9] but none have gained general consensus. These attempts merely underscore the existence of "contradictory" timing reports and the fact that the book's penman was not concerned to "correct" the "contradiction."

The distance traveled from the Hebrew settlements in Egypt to the slopes of Mount Sinai must have required approximately three days. That idiom may infer slightly more than three days, but it can hardly mean a journey of several months. The idiom *forty days* would be more likely for a journey lasting seven weeks (i.e., forty-nine days). Nevertheless, Exodus takes this three-day journey and maps it to the grain harvest dates of Canaan. The people's departure was ascribed to a date at the beginning of the barley harvest, whereas their arrival at Sinai corresponds to the timing of the wheat harvest. The fact that the author of the text allowed both the actual timing ("three days") and the observance timing

("seven weeks") to remain is itself instructive. The author was not concerned about providing a single, chronological timeline. These festival date "re-alignments" are done transparently.

The Date of the Tabernacle's Installation

Of all the difficulties that emerge from reading these dates as chronology, some have called the tabernacle installation date the most compelling.[10] Exodus 12 dates Israel's departure from Egypt to the first month of that year. The installation of the tabernacle is dated to New Year's Day the very next year. Meanwhile, there is much more that occurs in the intervening months than a single year allows.

According to the narratives, the people left Egypt on the fifteenth day of the first month (Ex 12:6, 29; Num 33:3). They arrived at Sinai at some point during the third month (Ex 19:1). After arriving at Sinai, there are ninety days explicitly accounted for: three days preceding the Decalogue (Ex 19:16), another seven days preparing for the elders to commune with God (Ex 24:16), forty days that Moses was on the mountain to receive tabernacle instructions and the first set of tablets (Ex 24:18; Deut 9:9), and another forty days he was on the mountain to receive the second set of tablets (Ex 34:28; Deut 9:18). In addition to those four precisely timed events (totaling ninety days), Moses made at least four other trips up the mountain (Ex 19:20; 20:21; 32:31; 33:21; 34:2), collected a national head tax (Ex 30:11-16), and confronted the golden calf in the camp (Ex 32:1-35).

If the two timed mountain ascents of 40 days each are taken as typical, then Moses' four additional trips up the mountain would add another 160 days to the schedule (4 × 40 = 160 days). If another 3 days are added for the census (Ex 30:11-16), 3 days for destroying the golden calf and executing the 3,000 perpetrators of that sin (Ex 32:28), 3 days for the plague (Ex 32:35), and 30 days for mourning the dead (Ex 33:4-6; cf. Num 20:29; Deut 34:8), another 39 days would be required. Thus, a total of 289 days (90 + 160 + 39 = 289)—or nine and a half months—would have elapsed between the arrival at Sinai in the third

month and the earliest possible date for tabernacle construction to begin. And that assumes that the described events all happened in direct succession, without any down time between them. This would mean that construction of the tabernacle did not start until *after* the following New Year's Day, the date Exodus 40 (vv. 2, 17) gives for its inauguration!

We could tighten that schedule if Moses spent only ten days on the mountaintop (instead of forty days) for each of his four additional climbs (4 × 10 = 40) and if the people mourned the dead for three days (rather than the typical thirty). In that case, only four and a half months (139 days = 90 + 40 + 9) would have elapsed between the people's arrival at Sinai and their beginning to build the tabernacle.

Nevertheless, even with such a pace, the tabernacle construction could have begun only around the beginning of the eighth month. That would leave five months for collecting, sorting, and organizing all the gold, silver, yarns, skins, and other raw materials required for the tabernacle (Ex 35:4-29); for Moses to communicate the instructions of the Lord to Bezalel and Oholiab; for those master craftsmen to enlist, organize, and train their craftsmen teams (Ex 35:30–36:1); and for the actual construction of all the parts, furnishings, and utensils of the tabernacle to be completed—using whatever furnaces and other equipment they could assemble in the wilderness—all while observing a sabbath rest each week. It would be remarkable for such a massive project to be completed so efficiently with modern manufacturing technologies![11]

If we are supposed to marvel that New Year's Day of year two was the tabernacle's actual installation date, it seems the text would extol the supernatural help of the Lord to accomplish so much in such a remarkable period of time. The narratives elsewhere draw attention to divine help on behalf of the nation during their wanderings (e.g., Ex 16:35; 34:28; Deut 29:5). God could have miraculously aided the Hebrews in constructing the tabernacle so quickly. However, since the author of the text does not show any need to explain the rapidity of these dates, it seems he was not intending the dates to be calculated as an actual chronology.

These scheduling difficulties are no difficulty, however, once we set aside modern expectations concerning the use of dates. The author does not seem concerned to report how long it actually took to build the tabernacle. Rather, the burden of the text is to lead later Israel to begin each year of tabernacle/temple-mediated worship by identifying with the heritage of the exodus forefathers. Like modern holidays assigned for observance on seasonally appropriate dates, the tabernacle completion is liturgically assigned for New Year's Day remembrance, without concern to preserve its actual inauguration date.

The Journey from Hor to Nebo

The books of Numbers and Deuteronomy coordinate the deaths of Aaron and Moses. Aaron's death is remembered on the first day of the fifth month (Num 33:38; cf. 20:22-29), and Moses' death is memorialized on the first day of the eleventh month that same year (Deut 1:3; 32:48-50). Those two dates six months apart are not enough time—if read as actual occurrence dates—for all that happened between them.

The people mourned at Mount Hor for thirty days after Aaron's death (Num 20:29). That leaves five months for Moses to lead the nation over 350 miles around Edom and Moab (Num 21:4),[12] leading them through three major military operations (vv. 1-3, 21-26, 31-35), resolving the problem of the "fiery serpents" (vv. 4-9), digging a well (vv. 16-20), sustaining the oracles of Balaam (22:1–24:25), going through the corruption with Baal of Peor (25:1-18), conducting a second census of the entire nation (26:1-65), resolving inheritance dilemmas (27:1-11), holding a national assembly for the appointment of Joshua and Eleazar as Moses' heirs (27:12-23), receiving revelation concerning more festival sacrifice laws (28:1–29:40) and laws about vows (30:1-16), and receiving final instructions about conquest and settlement (31:1–36:13). That is a lot to squeeze into the five months between mourning Aaron's death and the death of Moses. It is better to recognize the death dates for Aaron and Moses as remembrance dates rather than actual occurrence dates.

Various “One Day” Events

Several events are said to have occurred within the space of a single day that would typically require more than one day to accomplish. Those who read these dates as actual chronology will regard these as miraculous events. But the relevant passages do not, themselves, identify these events as miraculous. And in light of the mounting evidence for festival dating, it seems more likely that these one-day assignments are for remembrance purposes rather than chronological data.

The Passover night is one example of such “same day” timing. The theme of haste is woven throughout the account in Exodus 12. The people were instructed to eat the Passover meal “in haste,” attired for travel and leaving no food for the morning (Ex 12:8-11). When the Lord took the lives of all Egypt’s firstborn at midnight, Pharaoh compelled Moses, “Up, go out . . . , and be gone” (vv. 31-32).[13] The general Egyptian population was also “urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste” (vv. 33). As a result, the Hebrews could not even allow bread dough to rise but had to bundle up the day’s batch of dough to bake unleavened cakes along the journey (vv. 34, 39). Three times through the course of the account, the narrator repeats with amazement that it was “in the space of the same day [*bəʿeṣem hayyôm hazzeh*]”[14] that both the final plague came and Pharaoh capitulated (Ex 12:17, 41, 51). That phrase serves to contrast the many long centuries Israel waited (including the recent stubbornness of Pharaoh through many plagues) with the radical reversal that came so suddenly. The lesson is this: God may tarry for what seems like a long time, but when he acts, his salvation is decisive. Later worshipers were to eat unleavened bread to “taste” this hope in their own annual Passover meals (Ex 12:17, 39-42).

The haste woven into the event powerfully reflects upon *God’s* ability to work suddenly. But were *the people* empowered to organize and depart with supernatural suddenness? Once Pharaoh gave the word to “be gone,” how long did it actually take to leave? Nahum Sarna observes, “To move out of Egypt, on foot, over two million persons, including the aged and the children, as well as livestock, in that limited period of time [i.e., within the day] would be nothing

short of miraculous."[15] For comparison, according to a United Nations bulletin published in 2017, it took over a month for half a million Rohingya to flee their homes in Myanmar when driven out.[16] The circumstances of a willing versus an unwilling exodus are not exactly parallel, but large groups normally do not work efficiently, especially when evicted suddenly and without preparatory organization. It is impossible to be certain how long it took Israel to vacate their settlements once their release was so suddenly achieved. One could suppose that God stirred the minds of the entire population in a manner that miraculously brought about an organized, same-day departure. But the thrust of the passage is to underscore the suddenness of God's salvation, not the efficiency of Moses as a mass organizer. The text ascribes the people's departure as complete ("within that same day") in order to memorialize the entire event in the single, overnight Passover festival, not to suggest that several million slaves were actually gone before sunrise.

Another "same day" example is found in the opening chapter of Numbers, which begins with a census conducted on the first day of the second month, the second year after leaving Egypt (Num 1:1). The Lord instructed Moses on that day, and the census was also completed on the same day: "And on the first day of the second month, they assembled the whole congregation together, who registered themselves by clans" (Num 1:18-19). It is remarkable to imagine such an efficient registration of 603,550 men of war (Num 1:46) and 22,000 Levites (Num 3:39). The actual census may have taken more time to complete, but it is remembered on a single new moon day festival.

One of the most remarkable "single day" events in the exodus narrative is also its last. The entire book of Deuteronomy is identified with a single day. Deuteronomy begins with a timestamp: the first day of the eleventh month, forty years after leaving Egypt (Deut 1:3).[17] On that date, Moses assembled the people for his final sermon. Through the course of his sermon, the word *today* is repeated twenty-seven times.[18] Then, at the end of the book, Moses reportedly ascended Mount Nebo to die "in the space of the same day [*bəʿeṣem hayyôm hazzeh*]" (Deut 32:48-52, a.t.). Thus, "Deuteronomy seems to present the first day of the eleventh month not only as the date of Moses speaking, but also as the

day of Moses' death."[19] Moses ascended the mountain on that day, and the people mourned the rest of the eleventh month (Deut 34:8).

We are thus led to remember the final acts of Moses on a single festival date: the new moon day of the eleventh month. But the book of Deuteronomy also retains evidence that the events described in it actually occurred over a longer period. Among the various segments of Moses' sermon, the following activities are also reported: "Moses [gathered and] spoke to the people of Israel" (Deut 1:3); "Then Moses set apart three cities [of refuge] in the east beyond the Jordan" (Deut 4:41-43); "Moses summoned all Israel" (i.e., regathering the people on another occasion; Deut 4:44–5:1); "Now Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people" (i.e., regathering the people on a third occasion for teaching alongside the elders; Deut 27:1); "Then Moses and the Levitical priests said to all Israel" (i.e., a fourth instructional session, this time in conjunction with the Levitical priests; Deut 27:9); "And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them . . ." (i.e., a fifth assembly; Deut 29:1-2); "Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel . . ." (i.e., a sixth speech, this time directed at Joshua; Deut 31:7-8); "Then Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests" (i.e., not only speaking but writing down the contents of Deuteronomy and presenting the book to the priests with a seventh speech; Deut 31:9, 24); "And the LORD said to Moses . . ." (i.e., communications from God to Moses and Joshua; Deut 31:14, 18, 23); "'Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel' . . . Then Moses spoke the words of this song" (i.e., the composition and writing down of a hymn, with an eighth assembly to teach the hymn; Deut 31:19, 30; 32:44); "That very day the LORD spoke to Moses, 'Go up this mountain . . . and die on the mountain'" (i.e., final instructions from the Lord; Deut 32:48-50); "This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the people of Israel before his death" (i.e., a ninth assembly to bless the people; Deut 33:1); "Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo. . . . So Moses the servant of the LORD died there" (Deut 34:1-5).

That is a lot of activity to accomplish within one day. More to the point, it is a lot of activity for the author of Deuteronomy to present as happening on a

single day. The fact that the book is transparent about the many distinct, lengthy activities included in it, while also dating them all to a single new moon day, is itself revealing. The Pentateuch does not intend for readers to take its dates as actual occurrence chronology. They do not work as such, and the text shows no effort on the author's part to smooth over the "incongruences" that result when attempting to read them that way.

Conclusions

This catalogue of timing incongruities is not exhaustive, but it is representative. Nor is it gathered here to suggest the text is confused or inconsistent. On the contrary, as I have pointed out on several occasions, the writer is transparent about what the text is doing.

To illustrate, it might be true that poetry often rhymes, but it would be wrong to critique poets who "fail" to put rhyming words at the end of every line in their poetry. In similar respect, we have come to expect in modern histories that dates assigned to events will "rhyme" with the original occurrence timing. But ancient histories relied on event sequencing to provide timing for their narratives. Dates were not employed for that role the way they are in modern histories. We should not, therefore, criticize the Pentateuch for "failing to correct" the seeming incongruities between the chronology of its sequencing and its event dates. And we certainly should not turn a blind eye to these incongruities in some sort of "holy ignorance" that pretends the dynamic is not there.

We ought to allow the text itself to teach us why its dates do not match its own chronology. As we do so, we learn that the dates are not serving the chronology of history but the cadence of worship. It is not that the text has problems that the author never smoothed over. Rather, it is the readers' assumptions that need to be corrected.

The Pentateuch assigns dates to events for our festival instruction, not to preserve historical times. And there is a very good reason why this is so. In the next chapter, we will consider why the Pentateuch—as Israel's Torah (or law)—

contains narratives with liturgically determined dates on them, and we will look at the legal and literary techniques behind those date assignments.



DATES ASSIGNED BY LAW

IN 1968, THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS passed legislation that changed the dates of five holidays all at once. It was called the Uniform Monday Holiday Act (P.L. 90-363), and it moved five holidays previously observed on the exact anniversaries of the events remembered to regular observance on Mondays. George Washington's Birthday (or President's Day) was moved from Washington's actual birthday (February 22) to the third Monday of February. Columbus Day, formerly observed on October 12 to mark the actual date of Columbus's first landing in the New World (October 12, 1492), was reassigned to the second Monday in October. Memorial Day, Labor Day, and Veterans Day[1] were also moved to fixed Mondays.[2]

These changes were not prompted by new evidence regarding the precise dates of the events being remembered. They were knowingly moved away from their original occurrence dates in order to spread a series of three-day weekends through the year for the refreshment of American workers. It was the laboring schedule of those observing the calendar and their refreshment, not the history of the events remembered, that determined these appointments. And these changes were made only by an act of competent legal authority.

Likewise, it is in its capacity as Torah (Hebrew for "law") that the Pentateuch assigns observance dates (rather than recording occurrence dates) for its festival narratives. The Pentateuch was compiled to be the Torah for ancient Israel. As such, its purpose is to give God's people instructions about crimes and justice as well as sacrifices and calendars and worship regulation. It is in its

capacity and authority as the law of Israel that observance dates are assigned to the various narratives therein taught to us.

As previously noted, this practice is actually familiar to us in the way we assign dates for modern holidays. The fact that observance dates may vary from their original occurrence is not unusual to us. However, the manner in which the Pentateuch makes these date assignments is unusual by modern conventions. Today we use terminology like "Washington's Birthday, *observed*" or "Martin Luther King Jr. Day, *observed*." We keep track of both the original occurrence date and the ongoing observance date, with the holiday clearly delineated as the latter. But ancient Israel did not use language like "actual versus observed." Furthermore, the original occurrence date did not need to be preserved. All that was deemed important to preserve was the historical event and its observance date.[3] So the Pentateuch simply retells the event as having happened on the appointed observance date.[4]

This method might seem inconsistent with modern conventions for reporting dates, but several lines of evidence confirm the appropriateness of the practice in Old Testament Israel. In this chapter, I want to explore the legal and literary techniques at work behind these methods for assigning observance dates in the context of the narratives of Israel's Torah.

The Legal Character of the Pentateuch

Many different kinds of texts (or genres) are included in the Pentateuch. But the entire Pentateuch is called Torah (Hebrew for "law").[5] Some readers assume that the Pentateuch has this title because it *contains* laws.[6] However, the entire Pentateuch is Israel's Torah, including its narratives.

In most modern societies, "the law of the land" is written in the style of statutes or rules. The American Constitution, the US Law Code, and the various other regulations that define "American law" are written in the form of rules. Article 2 of the US Constitution does not tell stories about George Washington's presidency. It lists various powers and parameters of the presidency in abstract legalese. But ancient Israel's "constitution" (the Torah) contains both stories and

statutes—and it is all part of Israel's law of the land. Rather than defining the office of the priesthood exclusively through statutes, the Torah defines Israel's priesthood with both statutes and stories of Aaron the first high priest. This would be like incorporating narratives from the inaugural presidency of George Washington into article 2 of the American Constitution. This important fact about the Pentateuch has significant implications for how we read its historical narratives (and its other genres). It means that there is a legal purpose in all portions of the Pentateuch, not just those parts composed in the style of statutes or commandments.

Normally, a historical narrative is written to tell us what happened in the past. But as part of Israel's Torah, the narratives of the Pentateuch have an anticipatory purpose. They are histories about the past *told in a manner to instruct audiences in the present and the future.* Every historical narrative in the Bible has instructional value (1 Cor 10:11),[7] but the narratives in the Pentateuch —as *Torah* narratives—provide a more precise, technical kind of instruction. They participate in the *legal* guidance of ancient Israel, by which we mean instruction in the rituals, institutions, and regulations that defined Israel as an ordered kingdom. The historical narratives of the Torah are more than models of faith (though they certainly are that; see Heb 11:1-31). They are legal definitions of the various institutions and regulations of ancient Israel in story form.

For example, some of the Torah's narratives provide instruction about certain *ritual practices*. In Genesis 17:1-14, instructions on when, how, why, and whom to circumcise are provided in the form of a story (cf. Ex 4:24-26). In Genesis 32:22-32, certain dietary practices are taught in connection with a blessing the Lord announced on Jacob. The procedure for installing a new high priest upon the death of the previous one is indicated in a narrative in Numbers 20:22-29. The duties of each tribe to contribute for the upkeep of the national sanctuary is regulated in the form of a story in Numbers 7:1-89. In Genesis 22:1-14, a narrative about Abraham's first sacrifice on Mount Moriah (Mount Zion; 2 Chron 3:1) teaches the nature and purpose of sacrifices on Zion.[8] These and other Pentateuchal stories provide ritual instruction in narrative form.

Other Torah narratives authorize various *holy sites* and give instruction concerning the practices befitting each of them. Jerusalem (in its archaic name, Salem) is introduced as the city of kingship where sacred feasts are held and tithes are brought (Gen 14:18-20). Mount Zion (in its archaic name, Moriah) is introduced as the authorized site for sacrifice (Gen 22:1-14). Bethel is identified as a location for prayer before crossing the border to foreign lands and for offering thanksgivings upon one's return (Gen 28:10-22).

Some of the geographical narratives preserve the *legal boundaries* of Israel's entire claim, which are detailed in Numbers 34:1-15. The special allotments of Reuben and Gad located outside Israel's anticipated boundaries, along with the justification for their extraordinary location, is delineated in narrative form in Numbers 32:1-42. The legal status "cities of refuge," along with related procedural instructions, are assigned in the flow of the narrative in Numbers 35:9-34. A particularly intriguing set of legal boundaries is inscribed into a battle narrative in Numbers 21:24-30. That passage explains Israel's right to lands originally belonging to Moab and Ammon but justly acquired through a defensive war with Sihon. It is an interesting passage because, a few generations later, Jephthah cites that very narrative to defend Israel's legal right to those territories in an international dispute in his day (Judg 11:4-28).

The legal function of Torah narratives is also seen in the storied reports of various *sanctuary instruments*, giving their precise designs and functions (Ex 26:1–40:38). Certain *offices* within Israel also receive legal sanction through narratives, including Ephraimite rule in the house of Joseph (Gen 48:1-22), the exclusive primacy of Aaron's house among the Levites (Num 16:1–17:13), and the royal expectations attached to the house of Judah (Gen 49:10; Num 2:3; 7:12; 10:14).[9] Furthermore, many of the Torah's stories serve as *correlates to specific statutes*. For instance, the story of Jacob's favoritism to Joseph (the eldest son of his second wife; Gen 29:31; 37:3) is the inheritance law of Deuteronomy 21:15-17 retold in the form of a narrative.[10] Two narratives about the daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27:1-11; 36:1-12) serve to guide the application of inheritance statutes in unclear circumstances.[11] The story of

Moses' flight from Egypt (Ex 2:11-22) provides a narrative parallel to Israel's statutes on asylum (Ex 21:12-14; Num 35:9-34; Deut 19:1-13).[12]

In these and other ways, the stories in the Pentateuch are seen to be more than historical narratives. They are narratives composed for a special, legal purpose. Jonathan Burnside summarizes the character of biblical law, saying, "I would characterize 'biblical law' as an integration of different instructional genres of the Bible which together express a vision of society ultimately answerable to God."[13]

The legal function of even narratives in the Torah helps to explain why so many of its stories are assigned with festival dates. Normal historical narratives primarily tell us what happened, focusing on details about the past. The Torah narratives have an added, anticipatory function. They were written to instruct its audience on how to carry out present and future festival observances. Putting observance dates (instead of occurrence dates) into key festival narratives fits the legal purpose of the Pentateuch. In fact, this purpose can be demonstrated by careful attention to the schematic calendar employed in the writing of the Pentateuch's narratives.

Schematic Calendars and the Pentateuch

Scholars of the ancient world distinguish between schematic or administrative calendars, on the one hand, and civil or cultic calendars, on the other. The former is a strictly theoretical calendar with exactly 30 days in every month and 360 days in every year (i.e., 12 months of 30 days each). Ancient scribes in lands like Mesopotamia, Egypt, and even in Israel used this schematic calendar to make calculations manageable.[14]

Since one did not know whether an actual month would have twenty-nine or thirty days until the month was over, and one could not know whether a year would receive a "leap month" until an ad hoc proclamation from the king instituted it, running financial forecasts was impossible without a schematic calendar. Scribes used the schematic calendar to run projections when equipping armies, planning a building program, figuring palace expenses, anticipating

rental income, computing salaries, and conducting other economic projections. Indeed, the schematic calendar was used strictly for such prospective calculations.[15]

The cultic calendar—rooted in actual sightings of the sun and moon—governed the actual cadence of life and worship and the actual payment of salaries, rents, and other outlays. Sacha Stern explains, "[The schematic calendar's] purpose was only to simplify accounting, not to serve as an annual calendar; the calendar that was used for dating and other general purposes was lunar. Although the 360-day scheme was inaccurate in relation to the real-life lunar calendar . . . , it was acceptable as an administrative convention because it could work equally for or against the interests of the state's bookkeepers."[16] Thus, whenever events were recorded based on actual lunar sightings, the timing of the cultic calendar was used. The cultic calendar was retrospective: it was used to manage the present and to record what actually happened. But the schematic calendar was prospective: it was used to project costs and prepare instructions for the future.

We do not need schematic calendars in the modern world. Modern calendars are divorced from lunar sightings and have a predetermined number of days in each month, with a fixed schedule of leap year days. Calculations for the future can now be made using the same civil calendar by which people live in the present and remember the past. We know, for example, that exactly 5,478 days are included in a fifteen-year mortgage that runs from July 22, 2020, until July 22, 2035. The exactitude of modern calendars allows individuals as well as businesses and governments to calculate calendar-based commitments into the future with precision. Despite the fact that schematic calendars are no longer necessary, it is interesting to note that there are actually some instances in which banks today still employ the 30-day/month and 360-day/year schematic calendar. Remarkably, this practice of the ancient world has been handed down through medieval times to modern banking, and even today some banks still retain this inherited scribal practice to calculate certain interest rates using the schematic calendar.[17] But the practice is rare and not really necessary any longer. In the ancient world, however, where the lengths of months were uncertain and the

intercalation of extra months to keep the lunar and solar years aligned was done ad hoc, projecting future financial commitments was plagued with uncertainty. Therefore, economic forecasting was done by ancient scribes using a schematic calendar.

The use of the schematic calendar is also attested in Israel. Jonathan Ben-Dov writes,

> Priestly writings did use a schematic year for the purpose of long-term calculations. . . . This calendar is attested in Genesis 7:11–8:4, where a period of 150 days equals 5 consecutive 30-day months. This is also the reason for the placement of major biblical festivals in the Priestly and Holiness Codes on the 15th day of the month, the exact middle of a schematic month.[18]

Furthermore, archaeologists have unearthed "material objects from Iron Age Judah, demonstrating the everyday use of 30-day months and of the schematic year by clerks and administrators."[19] These finds consist of small bone plates with thirty holes arranged for use with pins as a thirty-day month calculation tool. Thus, through both biblical texts and archaeological evidence, the schematic calendar is known to have been used in Israel as well.

What is remarkable is that the schematic calendar appears in biblical *narratives* in the Pentateuch. Normally, historical records are kept using dates derived from actual solar and lunar sightings. "The administrative calendar was only used in the context of making calculations and never for dating [recorded events]," writes Lis Brack-Bernsen.[20] But the Pentateuch employs the schematic calendar in its *narratives*, most clearly seen in the flood account but indicated in other narratives as well.[21] Other passages in the Pentateuch similarly presuppose thirty-day months (Num 20:29; Deut 34:8), the fifteenth as the center of the month (Ex 16:1; Lev 23:6, 34, 39; Num 28:17; 29:12; 33:3), and other features pointing to the use of schematic rather than actual calendar dates.[22] This makes sense if the Pentateuchal narratives are given dates for legal guidance (an anticipatory use, like economic projections) rather than journalistic data recording actual event timing as things happened. Using the schematic calendar signals that readers should apply the narrative to the actual, variable calendar of their own day.

This would be roughly analogous to the use of the name John Doe or Jane Doe as a placeholder in a legal document or sample business form. Anyone who reads the name John Doe immediately recognizes that it serves to fill the place where a real person's name would be inserted when the paradigm is applied to a particular situation. Similarly, the schematic calendar served as a generic paradigm for future planning, with its idealized dates used for calculation but adapted to the actual dates dictated by lunar sightings for actual implementation.[23]

The use of schematic dates in a *historical record* is unprecedented. The significance of this point should not be overlooked. *This feature on its own demonstrates that the Pentateuch employs dates for anticipatory instruction and not as a record of when events actually occurred.* The use of schematic calendars in a narrative marks those narratives as anticipatory legal texts (i.e., calendar narratives) and not normal historical narratives recording past events with their original timing.

The use of schematic calendars is one of the legal features behind the Pentateuch's development of calendar narratives. But there is another legal drafting technique at work in these calendar narratives that bears recognition.

Legal (or Covenant) Speech Acts

The reason post-biblical readers often miss the fact that the dates in the Pentateuch are observance appointments, and not historical data, is because of the way in which the narratives assign observance dates. The historical events are stated as "having happened" on the assigned observance date. For instance, Numbers 33:3 reports, "They set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month . . . the day after the Passover." The date might be attached to that memory in order to schedule later observance of Passover and Unleavened Bread, but it is presented in language that identifies it as the date on which the event happened. Thus, it is common for modern readers to miss the liturgical (and nonjournalistic) nature of these dates.

Today we are careful to preserve the memories of both an event's actual anniversary and its date for memorialization. We preserve the record that Martin Luther King Jr. was actually born on January 15, and we carefully indicate that the holiday in his name is "Martin Luther King Jr. Day, *observed*," which falls on the third Monday of January and thus can be any day between January 15 and 21. It therefore falls short of modern conventions to find the biblical narratives assigning observance dates by saying "such and such happened" on this date. But this practice is completely in line with biblical conventions.

One of the techniques used in biblical law is a practice scholars call a speech act, which is an utterance that "does" something by pronouncing it to be the case.[24] For example, when Isaac blessed Jacob, he changed his son's status. Isaac conferred household authority on Jacob by legal pronouncement (a speech act). "Then his father Isaac . . . blessed him and said, . . . 'Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you" (Gen 27:26-29). That statement of blessing passed authority to Jacob. Compare this with a different word of blessing a few chapters later. When Jacob was living in the land of Haran, Laban said to him, "The LORD has blessed me because of you" (Gen 30:27). That was a description of the facts as Laban saw them, it was not a speech act. These two statements illustrate the distinction between a word of description (a speech) and a word of pronouncement (a speech act).

Marriage was enacted by speech act in ancient Israel, as it is today in the modern West. In marriage, a couple enters into a new covenant relationship. In modern weddings, this is typically done by taking vows. A common wedding vow used today (here imagined between Greg and Phyllis) begins, "I, Greg, take you, Phyllis, to be my lawfully wedded wife." In that statement, two relationships are indicated. First, Greg acknowledges that, to this point, Phyllis was *not* his wife. Prior to that vow, Phyllis was unrelated to Greg. But the vow also highlights the new relationship that begins at that moment. Greg "takes" Phyllis "to be" his wife. And unless Phyllis gets cold feet, she will presumably do the same when she takes Greg to be her lawfully wedded husband. Those vows are not mere observations, they *do* something. They are speech *acts*.

In ancient societies like Israel, marriages were similarly solemnized with an oral statement. However, the form of declaration was simpler. Sometimes in conjunction with a wedding banquet, the man would say to his bride, "you are my wife" or "you are my sister" (where the term *sister* is used to indicate the familial, female kinship of marriage and not just siblings; Gen 2:24; 29:21; Song 2:16; 4:9-12; 5:1-2; 6:3; 7:11; Prov 7:4; cf. Hos 2:2).[25] If these words were presented as statements of fact, they would be false. Except in rare instances like Abram, who did marry his half-sister (Gen 20:12), a man could not honestly call the woman he was marrying his sister—much less his wife—as a description of their natural relationship. But the marriage declaration was not a statement of facts as they stood. It was the declaration that created a new, legal status.

Adoption followed a similar custom. An adoptive father would publicly attest, "you are my son" or even, "today, I have begotten you" (Ps 2:7; cf. 2 Sam 7:14; Ex 4:22; Ezek 47:22-23). No one supposed the child was actually conceived by that man, and certainly not on that very day! But through a covenant speech act, the child was legally granted his new status. He was to be recognized, from that day forward, as one begotten by his adoptive father.[26]

These practices illustrate the use of speech acts in Old Testament Israel. A speech act is a declaration by competent authority, invoking a new legal status that replaced the previous, natural status. Israelites could not go about declaring new statuses at will. Only proper authorities could certify such changes. Nevertheless, covenant speech acts were an important facet of life in biblical Israel. It is this practice of assigning a new legal status to replace its natural status that lies behind the Torah's ascription of festival dates to historical events. The actual date on which the event occurred is replaced by a legal, festival-date assignment. Just as an adopted child is genuinely, by law (if not by nature), a "begotten son" of his adoptive father, the twenty-one dated events of the Pentateuch are genuinely, by law, made to have "occurred" on those dates.[27]

In fact, we find an intriguing library of examples of dates being assigned by speech act in another liturgical section of the Old Testament: the Psalms. In the Psalms, we find a series of instructive examples in which historical events are transparently "realigned" to match liturgical observances. These serve to

illustrate the application of speech acts to give new dates to liturgical instructions by saying “it happened” at such-and-such a time.

The Example of Psalm Headings

Many of the Psalms have headings, fourteen of which include timestamps. Those time references identify the origin of particular psalms with certain moments in the life of David.[28] They do so by stating that the psalm was composed “when” David was engaged in this or that event. However, the resulting date alignment is for liturgical purposes, not to suggest David actually penned these psalms at the time of the crisis thereby identified.

For example, Psalm 34 is the song “of David, when he changed [*bəšannôtô*] his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away” (Ps 34, superscription). The event in view took place when David was running from Saul. He found himself in the court of the Philistine king of Gath,[29] and he barely escaped with his life by pretending to be insane. (See the full story in 1 Sam 21:10-15.) The heading on Psalm 34 uses a Hebrew phrase that indicates timing, suitably translated “when.”[30] The psalm is thereby dated to the time *when* David was in the court of Gath. But David was not crafting poetry that same afternoon he was feigning insanity. It was some time after he escaped that David reflected back on that day and penned this psalm. The reason for this timestamp is liturgical.[31] Later worshipers needed to know that God hears the kind of cry captured in that psalm. The date in the heading assures its singers that David, in his hour of danger, clung to the same faith that this psalm now helps us to foster in our trials.[32] Consequently, we do not know the actual timing when David wrote this psalm,[33] but we do know that God hears us when we raise the cry in this psalm just as he heard David’s cry in the court of the Philistines. The psalm heading is there to aid the needful worshiper; it is not there to aid the curious historian.

Psalm 57 is another interesting example. That psalm has the heading, “A Miktam of David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave” (Ps 57, superscription; cf. 1 Sam 22:1; 24:3). David did cry out to God in the cave, but

he was not poring over his parallelisms while panting in the shadows. In fact, only the first half of the psalm captures David's cry from the cave (vv. 1-5). The second half of the psalm is a declaration of praise *after* God had rescued David: "They dug a pit in my way, but they have fallen into it themselves. . . . I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples" (vv. 6-11). The psalm's thanksgiving section confirms that it was written after the fact, even though the heading includes a timestamp for the moment when David was inside the cave.

Under modern historical conventions, this seems inconsistent. Today we would expect the actual composition date to be preserved or that liturgical timestamps would be distinguished in some way from the actual timing. But biblical authors did not share the same concerns, as illustrated by the time ascriptions on numerous psalms. The result is a loss of certain details of historical curiosity (i.e., when exactly this or that psalm was actually written), but it increases the psalm's spiritual helpfulness.

It is a well-worn but abiding principle of interpretation: to read any text accurately, it is important to read it within the conventions of its genre. And while the Pentateuch contains many different genres within its five volumes, altogether it comprises the kind of literature called Torah, meaning "law." It is important, therefore, to recognize the legal techniques behind the Pentateuch's narratives and their function as *legal* narratives, including its calendar narratives.

Conclusions . . . *and Beginnings*

Hans Christian Andersen's classic children's story *The Ugly Duckling*[34] describes the life of a little bird hatched in a barnyard where there were ducks. The fledgling grew up being picked on and criticized because it did not measure up to the expectations of the other ducks. But eventually the reasons for this bird's "insufficiencies" as a duck became clear: it was not a duck after all. The bird needed to be re-categorized among the beautiful and graceful swans.

In several respects, the Pentateuch has suffered the fate of the ugly duckling, especially since the rise of post-Enlightenment scholarship. Since the Enlightenment, the Bible has been subjected to extensive scholarly criticism.

Much of this examination has been immensely fruitful, but aspects have also been troubling to faith communities. Genuine problems have been identified in the texts that deserve careful assessment by the church. But some "problems" are the result of judging the Pentateuch against the assumptions of modern texts. It has been fashionable, for example, to critique the "inconsistencies" in biblical laws (when evaluated by the expectations of modern legislation)[35] and to speculate on the "real" composition history of the Pentateuchal narratives (based on the assumptions of modern literary composition).[36] Within this atmosphere, the dates on Pentateuchal narratives have been another topic for biblical criticism. Indeed, the dates in the Pentateuchal narratives do not make sense when held up to modern assumptions of historical reporting. But the dates serve a different function in the Pentateuch. They are part of *Torah* narratives, and the dates are not original event occurrence dates but rather festival observance dates.

This insight has many ramifications. Obviously our reading of the narratives in the Pentateuch is aided by this discovery. But the festivals of Israel are important throughout the Bible, so an increased understanding of them is basic to many frontiers of biblical interpretation (potentially even New Testament narratives, such as the way the Synoptics and John relate the crucifixion to the Feast of Passover). But one of the most pressing implications of this study of Pentateuchal calendars relates to one of the narratives of the Torah we have not yet addressed.

The opening chapter of the Pentateuch is the story of creation (Gen 1:1–2:3), one of the most hotly debated texts in the Bible. Some insist it is poetry. Others insist it is a historical narrative. Still others insist it is an ancient Near Eastern myth.[37] My argument affirms the character of the creation week as a historical narrative, but of a particular type. It participates in the law-giving function of the Pentateuch and serves as another of the calendar narratives designed to bring God's works to bear on Israel's metronome of labor and worship in the land. The dates do not reflect original occurrence timing but rather later Israel's legally instructed observance timing. This approach to the creation week accords with the Pentateuch's own representation of that narrative in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . For in six

days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day" (Ex 20:8-11).

Building on the foundations already laid regarding the natural shape of Israel's calendars (chapters one to three) and the legal character of the Pentateuch's calendar narratives (chapters four to six), the third part of this book (chapters seven to eleven) will apply these insights for a calendar narrative reading of the Genesis creation week. The idea of reading the creation week as a calendar is not novel. It is an approach as old as the fourth commandment. Scholars frequently affirm that "the Sabbath and Gen 1 are the creation of a sacred rhythm . . . [and] a sacred calendar."[38] But to date, no one has completed the kind of rigorous examination of the Pentateuch's own methods for shaping its narratives into calendars as a context to consider what it means to treat the creation week as "a sacred calendar." It is my effort to serve that need in this book.

My prayer is that the following exploration of the creation week as a festival calendar narrative—on analogy to what we have identified in the flood and exodus narratives—will contribute toward peace and progress in this important frontier of biblical scholarship and the Christian community.

Part III

THE CREATION WEEK



THE CREATION WEEK AS CALENDAR NARRATIVE

THERE IS ONE DATED NARRATIVE in the Pentateuch we did not examine in the previous section: the creation week narrative in Genesis 1:1–2:3. Debates about the creation week frequently focus on the text's genre. Is it poetry, calling for interpretation as metaphors? Is it ancient Near Eastern mythology to be read in parallel with other ancient myths? Is it a historical narrative best understood as a straightforward reporting of events?

In the previous section of this book (chapters four through six), I have endeavored to open up another possibility—or, more properly, a variation on the historical narrative position. C. John Collins has offered a helpful characterization of the creation week as "exalted prose narrative."[1] It is neither poetry nor mythology, but it is a historical narrative that invokes the terseness and rich imagery that approaches poetry. But I have endeavored to say something more about the character of several of the Pentateuch's narratives. I have shown that the Pentateuch regularly employs narratives for law-instruction purposes, and when dates are added, they often serve as calendar narratives. We saw this special use of narratives in our examination of the flood narrative (Gen 7:6–8:22) and the exodus narrative (Ex 12:1–Deut 34:12). In this chapter, I want to show that the creation week is another of the Torah's calendar narratives.

Genesis 1:1–2:3 provides a narration of creation events, but the timing and details of its telling are transparently "re-mapped" to the cadence and themes of Israel's weekly sabbath festival. The purpose of the narrative is not simply to teach the people what happened but to teach them how to remember God's work

and God's rest through their own weekly labors and worship. This is, in fact, what the fourth commandment identifies as the creation narrative's function:[2]

> Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Ex 20:8-11)

In this third part of the book, I want to offer an exposition of the creation week as a calendar narrative. Inevitably there will be controversial points along the way. It is impossible to speak about the creation week without engaging in at least some of the many swirling controversies surrounding the passage. But I hope my readers will be patient where I touch on those controversies, in order to consider the overarching position I am endeavoring to carve out in this project: namely, engagement with the creation narrative as a metronome for faithful stewardship in God's image (the first six days) and communion in his presence (the seventh day). This, I believe, is the calling of the fourth commandment and is what the Torah's own pattern of calendar narratives supports. And this, I regret, is something from which contemporary creation-evolution controversies threaten to distract us.

In this chapter, I want to frame this approach to the Genesis 1:1–2:3 creation week as a calendar narrative. After that (in chapter eight) I will begin to engage with the "big picture" structure of the passage itself. And in subsequent chapters (nine through eleven), I want to explore each of the seven creation days as guidance for our labor and worship as God's people today. I want to acknowledge up front that different traditions have developed various theological perspectives on how New Testament Christians continue, replace, or adapt the Old Testament sabbath. I do not intend to engage in those New Testament questions in the present volume (important as they are). But I take for granted that most of those reading this book will recognize the fourth commandment as having some form of ongoing relevance for the church and that grasping the implications of the creation week sabbath in its Old Testament

context is foundational for our further reflections on the New Testament continuation of that principle.

Creation Week as a Calendar Narrative

In part two of this book, we examined twenty-one dated events in the Pentateuch. We saw that all of those dated events occur within the flood and the exodus narratives. We further noted how the dates on those narratives served to "re-map" their remembrances to the seasonal harvest calendar of Canaan. The flood and exodus narratives rehearsed two parallel histories of deliverance to a good land. By applying those narratives to the annual cadences of labor and harvest in Canaan, Israel was helped to farm and gather from that land in faithfulness and praise. The creation week narrative adds another seven dated events to that tally. We could update our count to twenty-eight dated events in the Pentateuch, although the nature of the dates in Genesis 1:1–2:3 are different.

There are no month references in Genesis 1:1–2:3. Furthermore, the day numbers are not referring to the dates within the month (e.g., "fifteenth of the month"). However, they are dates within the week. In English-speaking societies, we call the days of the week by names: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and so forth. In biblical (and modern) Hebrew, the days of the week are called by numbers: first day (*yôm hāriʾšôn* or rarely *yôm ʾeḥād*), second day (*yôm šēnî*), third day (*yôm šəlîšî*), and so on. This is analogous to the way biblical Hebrew originally identified the months by number (first month, second month, etc.) To count days can simply indicate a series of days, as when twelve days of offerings are counted in sequence in Numbers 7:1-83. But when the six numbered days are counted off culminating in the seventh-day sabbath, the dates of the week are being named.

In Exodus 16:1-30, for example, a week of manna is described as beginning "on the fifteenth day of the second month" (Ex 16:1). Even though the narrative opens by identifying the events as beginning on the fifteenth day within the month, the story unfolds using the numbering of the days within the week. In particular, the account identifies the sixth and seventh days of the week, the

seventh being a sabbath (rather than identifying those days by their month numbers, the twentieth and twenty-first days).

There are interpreters who question the interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3 as a normal week containing a series of seven twenty-four-hour days.[3] However, most scholars agree that the word *yôm* ("day") is used in the creation week as normal twenty-four-hour days.[4] The repeated reference to "evening and morning" between days and their counting with ordinal numbers are strong indicators that this is a normal week.[5] John Sailhamer sums up the matter:

> Finding geological ages in the "days" of creation stretches the imagination of even many sympathetic readers. To suggest that the biblical writer intended the "days" in Genesis 1 to correspond to thousands, or millions, of years is a conspicuous attempt to harmonize the Bible and science. Though it may satisfy the demands of science, it can hardly claim to deal fairly with the text of Genesis.[6]

The creation week in Genesis 1:1–2:3 is a normal 168-hour week.[7]

However, a further question must be raised in light of the study completed in the previous sections of this book. Is the creation narrative reporting God's creative works with actual occurrence dates, or are the day numbers in this text observance dates like the month dates in the other calendar narratives of the Pentateuch? Did God perform his deeds of creation on these actual dates of the world's first week of existence, which are then reported to us journalistically? This is what we would normally expect from a historical narrative. However, in this book I am arguing that God completed his works of creation with timing that has not been preserved, and his works are ascribed with the days of the week to guide Israel's sabbath festival observance. It is the thesis of this book that the creation week narrative contains the history of God's ordering of the world, mapped to Israel's observance schedule for stewarding that order with labor and worship, without any concern to preserve the events' original occurrence timing. I will endeavor to support this thesis concerning the creation week in this final part of the book.

This method for presenting narratives as calendrical instruction ("law") is what we saw elsewhere in the Torah. There are compelling reasons to draw the same conclusion here. Just as in the flood and exodus narratives, there are also

events within the creation week narration that do not fit within the confines of twenty-four-hour days. And the text does not reveal any effort to make these long events fit within the days to which they are assigned. Perhaps the most striking example is on day three.

Day three reports, "And God said, 'Let the earth sprout [*dāšāʾ*] vegetation, plants yielding [*mazrîaʿ*] seed, and fruit trees bearing [*ʿāśâ*] fruit in which is their seed . . . ' And it was so" (Gen 1:11-13). The verbs in this passage describe plant growth from sprouting (*dāšāʾ*) to fully mature plants and trees laden with (*ʿāśâ*) fruit. These plants did not merely begin to grow on the third day, but "it was so." The command for them to sprout (*dāšāʾ*) and then yield (*mazrîaʿ*) seed and bear (*ʿāśâ*) fruit all took place in the time ascribed with the date "the third day." This is a process that take months in the case of vegetation, and it takes years for fruit trees to mature and bear fruit. Consider two staples of Hebrew farming: olive trees take seven years to reach fruit-bearing maturity, and the important date palm does not begin to bear fruit until between fourteen and thirty-five years after planting![8] While these growth processes are unfamiliar to modern readers of the text, the average Hebrew listener would hear those verbs of growth—from sprouting to bearing fruit—with tangible acquaintance with the process being described.

Modern interpreters might conclude that this was a high-speed process, like a film on fast forward,[9] or that the trees appeared fully formed instantaneously.[10] But the passage says the plants grew through all the normal stages; they did not appear fully formed. Nor does the passage provide any modifiers or other indicators of unusual rapidity. The Lord called on the soil, and "the soil brought forth vegetation" (Gen 1:12, a.t.; cf. Gen 2:8). The ascription to "the third day" of an event that entails years is similar to what we noted in other dated narratives in the Torah. And we now recognize that the assignment of observance dates without concern for chronology is a stock feature of legally purposed historical narratives. The third-day events support the conclusion that these too are observance dates and not occurrence dates. An interpreter might find creative ways to soften this third-day anomaly, but the credulity of doing so is strained as

the number of other similar chronological "problems" are noted throughout the narrative.

In fact, the numerous chronological anomalies of the creation week have been a topic of discussion in the church for centuries. As far back as the third century, the early church father Origen famously cited several of the most striking when he wrote, "For who that has understanding will suppose that the first, and second, and third day, and the evening and the morning, existed without a sun, and moon, and stars [ascribed to the fourth day]? And that the first day was, as it were, also without a sky [ascribed to the second day]?"[11] Various theologians through history have offered possible solutions. However, a simple explanation arises from within the Pentateuch itself. When narratives are composed as festival guidance ("law"), it is normal for the dates to serve that liturgical purpose *without concern for the original event's actual chronology.*

Let me stress that I do not draw out these anomalies to suggest the writer of the account was sloppy. These "problems" are too obvious to suggest the original compiler did not notice them. The presence of event timing that does not comport with the text's assigned dates is a characteristic feature of the Pentateuch's calendar narratives, and it demonstrates that chronology is not the author's purpose for adding dates to the account. In fact, another example makes this particularly clear.

In the creation week narrative, the creation of birds is identified with day five (Gen 1:21), the land animals with the first part of day six (Gen 1:24-25), and humankind (both man and woman) at the end of day six (Gen 1:26-27). But the Eden narrative describes the creation of the man first (Gen 2:7), followed by the creation of "every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens" (Gen 2:19), and then finally, after a "deep sleep" (perhaps indicating an overnight sleep into the next day), the creation of the woman (Gen 2:21-22). Traditionally these are regarded as separate descriptions of the same event. But if that is so, then the chronology is transparently realigned for one or the other account. What I find most significant is not the presence of this difference but the lack of any indication that the compiler of the account considered it a problem. This is all compelling evidence that these accounts are not written to preserve the actual

chronology of the creation events. Like the other dated narratives of the Pentateuch, the creation week narrative is a calendar for the listener's guidance. It is transparently prepared without any concern to make the timing of the events described comport to the dates assigned, since the dates are provided to guide observance timing, not to preserve an occurrence timeline.

Perhaps the most persuasive reason to treat the creation week as a calendar narrative is in what the text says about God's pattern of work throughout the passage. All through the creation week, God is "pictured in overalls," in a manner of speaking. He is portrayed as a Model Laborer who rises in the morning to go about the day's chores. At the end of each day, he stops to reflect and take satisfaction in a job well done (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Then each evening until the next morning, he rests from the day's labor before starting again the next day (Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). According to C. John Collins, this is a highly stylized portrayal that sets an example for how humans should work:

> The refrain ["evening and morning"] . . . present[s] God as a workman going through his workweek, taking his daily rest (the night between the evening and the morning) and enjoying his Sabbath "rest." To speak this way is to speak analogically about God's activity. . . . That analogy provides guidance for man in the proper way to carry out his own work and rest.[12]

But it is not a description of God's actual work schedule. He is eternal and is not constrained by time nor by weariness in his labors (Is 40:28).

The "evening and morning" cadence in the text transparently does not fit with the sequence of events included (e.g., the sun and moon were not created until day four), but that pattern does serve to relate God's works to the human pattern of observance (i.e., humans typically work during the day and cease overnight). These features are consistent with the other calendar narratives of the Pentateuch, revealing that the works of God are here adapted to the cadences of human labor and rest as a model for us. None of the Torah's calendar narratives preserve original occurrence dates; they all remap God's works to Israel's festival observance dates.

The highly stylized, calendrical, and idiosyncratic character of the creation week narrative has long been recognized as lending a liturgical cast to the

narrative. Walter Vogels summarizes the consensus saying that "nearly all scholars recognize the liturgical character of the creation narrative."[13] My proposal fits within the consensus but builds on it by drawing on the broader Pentateuchal pattern of calendar narratives.[14] The result is an interpretation that maximizes the narrative's practical instruction and removes it from use in questions about science and origins chronology. The text simply does not preserve the answers to those questions.

We should no more use the creation week narrative to determine how long God spent creating the world than use dates in the book of Exodus to calculate the duration of Israel's journey from Egypt to Sinai, or other dates in the Pentateuch to calculate the time it took to build the tabernacle. The Torah was not written to preserve those chronologies nor to answer many other questions that modern-day historians and scientists like to ask, interesting and worthy as those questions may be. The Torah was compiled to instruct the faith of God's people within the cadences of the sabbaths and festivals of farming and worship.

Creation Week as a Historically Situated Narrative

By calling Genesis 1:1–2:3 a calendar narrative, we ascribe its timing to that of its festival observance. Nevertheless, we also thereby affirm the fundamental historicity of the events it recounts. Even if we cannot know from Genesis 1:1–2:3 how long God actually took to create the world, we do accept that this text narrates the reality that he did so. It is a historical narrative, albeit a *calendar* narrative. Should we thereby conclude that the events described occurred in the manner here summarized, if not necessarily in the dated timing described? Standard principles for interpreting historical narratives—including sensitivity to anthropomorphized presentations of God and culturally situated worldviews—ought to guide our answer to this question.

We have already noted that the narrative is shaped in a way to portray God as a Model Worker. Like many Old Testament narratives, God is anthropomorphized in the passage in ways that the reader ought to take seriously

but not to overread. It would be surprising if a reader interpreted the creation week's anthropomorphized portrait of God working during the daytime hours and ceasing for the night as revealing the actual schedule God keeps on a daily basis.[15] Even Jesus warned not to misread the seventh-day description of God as though he actually ceases from divine activity on the sabbath day (Jn 5:17). Whatever timing and methods God employed to create the world, they have been anthropomorphized in this passage for our guidance. This is a common feature in biblical narrative that needs to be handled here with the same carefulness as in other narratives (e.g., Gen 2:7; 18:20-21; Ex 32:7-14).[16]

Furthermore, one of the consistent features of the biblical texts is their situation within the language and mentality of the society in which God was revealing his Word. This includes the period "scientific" conception of the world. In divine revelation, God imposes heaven's moral and redemptive worldview on humanity, but he consistently leaves the cultural attainments of the peoples to whom he spoke untouched. There is no effort anywhere in Scripture to lift God's people out of their period understandings of (what we now call) the sciences. As John Walton notes, "Through the entire Bible, there is not a single instance in which God revealed to Israel a science beyond their own culture."[17]

Thus, Psalm 121 prays for protection from being "moonstruck" (Ps 121:6; cf. Mt 17:15), and Psalm 58 likens the disappearance of the wicked to the gradual dissolving of snails as they slither (Ps 58:8).[18] In the Old Testament, "functions we now associate with the brain are attributed . . . to other bodily organs" (e.g., 1 Sam 13:14; Ps 16:7; Prov 23:15).[19] Rather than teaching Jacob about genetics in order to pull off his goat-breeding contest with Laban, God was pleased to use Jacob's archaic (and scientifically untenable) breeding methods to grant him striped and spotted flocks (Gen 30:25-43).[20] Rather than healing the toxic waters Israel encountered in the wilderness by revealing breakthrough lessons on poison control, God instructed his prophets in the use of period "sympathetic medicinal" concepts to treat bitter water with bitter wood (Ex 15:25) or bitter salt (2 Kgs 2:21; cf. Num 21:4-9; 1 Sam 6:4).[21] Even the angels of heaven appeared to the ancients bearing swords (e.g., Num 22:23), riding chariots (e.g., 2 Kgs 6:17), and with attire and utensils to match the

culture of the audience (e.g., Ezek 9:2) rather than wielding advanced weaponry or otherworldly implements. In the New Testament, the apostle Peter invokes the period theory of humors, diagnosing Simon the Magician's greed as an imbalance of "gall of bitterness [*cholēn pikrias*]" in his blood (Acts 8:23).[22] The Scriptures contain many prophecies of the future, but remarkably none of them prove their authenticity through "sneak peeks" into future technological or scientific discoveries. The same is true of the Genesis 1:1–2:3 creation narrative, which reveals God's creative work within the cosmic understandings of the ancient world.

The presence of a pre-scientific worldview into the creation account is difficult for some Christians to accept, even though we generally admit the widespread appearances of other pre-scientific descriptions in other parts of Scripture (like those listed above). Somehow the creation account has been turned into a test case for the reliability of God based on its scientific "accuracy." Ironically, this inclination commonly emerges among Christians eager to champion a literal reading of the text, but it ends up leading to non-literal readings in order to avoid its archaic features, such as the reference to a dome over the earth in Genesis 1:6-8.[23] To require Genesis to conform to the insights of modern science would be like attempting to explain Jacob's breeding practices in Genesis 30:25-43 by asserting that mating goats in front of striped sticks can be scientifically shown to produce striped offspring. God has not been in the practice of revealing new science to his prophets. The Genesis creation account is a narrative, but it is a historically situated narrative like all other biblical narratives.

John Calvin offers an eloquent explanation why God has been pleased to give his revelation within the cultural understandings of the original audiences. In his commentary on the heavenly lights in Genesis 1:16, Calvin wrote the following (I quote at length because his words are so helpful on this point):

> Moses does not here subtilely [*sic*] descant, as a philosopher, on the secrets of nature, as may be seen in these words [in Gen 1:16]. First, he assigns a place in the expanse of heaven to the planets and stars; but astronomers make a distinction of spheres, and, at the same time, teach that the fixed stars have their proper place in the firmament. Moses makes two great luminaries; but

> astronomers prove, by conclusive reasons, that the star of Saturn, which, on account of its great distance, appears the least of all, is greater than the moon. Here lies the difference; Moses wrote in a popular style things which, without instruction, all ordinary persons, endued with common sense, were able to understand; but astronomers investigate with great labour whatever the sagacity of the human mind can comprehend . . .
>
> Astronomy is not only pleasant, but also very useful to be known: it cannot be denied that this art unfolds the admirable wisdom of God. Wherefore, as ingenious men are to be honoured who have expended useful labour on this subject, so they who have leisure and capacity ought not to neglect this kind of exercise. Nor did Moses truly wish to withdraw us from this pursuit in omitting such things as are peculiar to the art; but because he was ordained a teacher as well of the unlearned and rude as of the learned, he could not otherwise fulfill his office than by descending to this grosser method of instruction. Had he spoken of things generally unknown, the uneducated might have pleaded in excuse that such subjects were beyond their capacity . . .
>
> If the astronomer inquires respecting the actual dimensions of the stars, he will find the moon to be less than Saturn; but this is something abstruse, for to the sight it appears differently. Moses, therefore, rather adapts his discourse to common usage . . . Let the astronomers possess their more exalted knowledge; but, in the meantime, they who perceive by the moon the splendour of night, are convicted by its use of perverse ingratitude unless they acknowledge the beneficence of God.[24]

In parallel comments on the sun, moon, and stars in Psalm 136:7, Calvin adds,

> The Holy Spirit had no intention to teach astronomy; and, in proposing instruction meant to be common to the simplest and most uneducated persons, he made use by Moses and the other Prophets of popular language, that none might shelter himself under the pretext of obscurity, as we will see men sometimes very readily pretend an incapacity to understand, when anything deep or recondite is submitted to their notice.[25]

When Calvin says that Scripture uses “popular language,” he is not referring to common points of grammar and vocabulary. He means that God speaks to people within the cultural parameters of the age, including its pre-scientific understanding of astronomy. This is not a mark of imperfection in God’s Word, as much as modern Christians might yearn to show the Bible as scientifically precise. According to Calvin, it is a mark of God’s love and his desire to make his Word accessible to the simple that he always spoke within the cultural (if scientifically archaic) understandings of the age.[26]

It is unwise to speculate what church fathers like Calvin would think about modern Genesis creation controversies.[27] But Calvin’s insight on God’s pleasure

to speak within the scientific understanding of his audience rather than confusing people with anachronistic information is spot on. The Bible gives no supernatural insight into the understanding and treatment of cancer. It does, however, teach us profound lessons of faith to sustain us in the face of afflictions like cancer; it assures us of the ultimate solution of our ailments in God's work of redemption; and it guides us to pray and seek medical care for such illnesses. But the Bible should not be decoded in a search for divine insight into the etiology and treatment of cancer (cf. Deut 29:29). Instead, we should affirm the importance of medical research to guide our understanding and mastery of illness and its treatment. Scripture grants humankind warrant to explore and to study. But it is unnecessary (even wrong) to take Scriptures as divine answers to modern scientific questions not within the text's inherent purview—and that includes the creation week text in Genesis 1:1–2:3. The creation week is a narrative; but just like many other Old Testament narratives, it presents a highly anthropomorphized depiction of God and employs historically situated pre-scientific concepts of the world.

The creation week should not, therefore, be strained for answers to modern scientific questions. Those answers are not coded into the text. We need to turn elsewhere to explore the questions raised in the scientific quest, and the resulting scientific enterprise ought to be ardently supported by Christians. In fact, the closing chapters of Job suggest that God wants humanity to pursue questions of origins and that he has deliberately left mysteries there for us to explore. God famously confronted Job with a series of questions about the work of creation: "Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: . . . 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding, Who determined its measurements?'" (Job 38:1-5). In a series of confrontations, the Lord forced Job to realize that it is beyond human comprehension to answer the questions of natural origins.[28] Nevertheless, the Lord encourages the quest, for it leads us to marvel and stirs us to worship (Job 42:1-6).[29] Job shows us the need for God-fearing men and women to engage with the deep mysteries of the created order—mysteries that God's Word does not reveal but that he urges us to consider and explore.

The scientific enterprise is therefore encouraged by the Bible, but its answers are not revealed in the Bible. There may be an "authoritative allure" around science that tempts Christians to defend the authority of God's Word by ascribing scientific insight to it (see "Excursus: The Allure of Scientific Readings"). But we should not suppose that God is glorified when we try to read Genesis within the conventions of modern science. Instead, we need to read the creation week on its own terms—including a literal reading of its twenty-four-hour days *as well as* a literal reading of the heavenly dome, slow-growing trees, the appearance of the sun and moon after the inauguration of evenings and mornings, and so forth. Those who argue most ardently for a literal reading of the days are often those who labor most ardently to deny a literal reading of the text's pre-scientific features. We should read all these features in a straightforward manner, within the conventions of a calendar narrative with divine anthropomorphisms and a historically situated worldview as trained by the other narratives of the Pentateuch. The result will be a recovery of the creation week as a practical guide for weekly labor and worship in a form the ancient Hebrew farmer would readily grasp. The scientific pioneer Galileo Galilei was fond of saying, "The intention of the Holy Ghost is to teach us how one goes to heaven, not how heaven goes."[30]

Excursus: The Allure of Scientific Readings

It is not hard to identify the appeal behind reading modern science into the creation account. Our society reveres science as a great—some would say the ultimate—arbiter of truth. It is therefore tempting to champion the truth of Genesis 1:1–2:3 by giving it a scientific voice.[31] It seems like a boon to biblical Christianity if the opening chapters of the Bible can be shown to speak with scientific precision. And this yearning is not unique to Christian apologists. In fact, the pressure to "scientifically certify" one's position is felt in many corners of society.

The rhetorical power of science can be seen in the pervasive use of scientific assertions in business advertising. Cosmetics advertisers, for example, frequently make scientific claims like “clinically proven” or “dermatologists recommend” to market their products. However, 86 percent of such claims were found, in one study, to be untenable.[32] The byline of Orkin, a major extermination company, is “Pest Control Down to a Science.” Promoting its service as a scientific pursuit bolsters its claim to effectiveness. All around us, scientific claims add a compelling voice of authority to one’s message.

The appeal to science is also found in other religious and philosophical movements. The Indian spiritualist Deepak Chopra is a prominent example of such efforts.[33] Chopra has promoted an elaborate new age philosophy of health and spirituality, weaving together the authoritative voices of both ancient holy men and modern science (esp. quantum physics) to enhance his persuasiveness. Some Muslim apologists also invoke scientific proofs to bolster the reliability of Islam. For example, certain passages in the Qur’an are said to report the Big Bang and the expanding universe: “The heavens and the earth were a closed-up mass, then We opened them out” (Qur’an 21:30); “And the heavens We [Allah] built with Our own powers and indeed We go on expanding it” (Qur’an 51:47).[34] By finding these insights into modern science allegedly predicted in the Qur’an, the book’s authority is promoted. Some Muslim missionaries even try to get ahead of the game by predicting, through passages in the Qur’an, that extraterrestrial life will one day be found. One Ahmadiyya poster quotes Qur’an 42:30, “And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and of whatever living creatures He has spread forth in both. And He has the power to gather them together when He pleases,” and then states, “The Holy Qur’an not only categorically acknowledges the existing [*sic*] of Extraterrestrial Life but also prophecizes [*sic*] about our contact with it. The time of such a contact is not shared with us and is left to Allah’s will ‘ . . . when He pleases.’”[35] Such statements reveal an effort to demonstrate the scientific insight of a holy book by getting ahead of the modern scientific enterprise.[36]

Many Christian leaders also appeal to science to “prove” the truth of the Christian Bible. These efforts among Christians reflect the immense cultural

pressure on the church to demonstrate the truthfulness of our faith through its ability to "measure up" to the latest discoveries of modern science.

But science did not always have the seat of authority in society. To consider a parallel situation from a different age, we can turn back to the centuries leading up to the New Testament. In the generations before Christ came, the Greeks and Romans introduced a new order of "civilized" society into the "barbarian" lands of the east. The authoritative principle behind Greco-Roman civilization was the rule of law—a new way of using law books regarded by the Greeks as the mark of a truly civilized culture.

Under the new presupposition that the rule of law distinguished civilized peoples from barbarians, Jews were under immense social pressure either to admit that the God of Israel gave Moses a barbarian law book or to prove the civilized nature of God by reinterpreting the Mosaic law according to the new standards of Greek legalism. Under the allure of Greek standards, legalistic uses of the law of Moses emerged, which ultimately burdened the people, were condemned by Jesus (Mt 5:17-48; 23:1-36), and missed the Christ.[37] Jewish historian Yaacov Shavit explains,

> Living in a world where Greek political ideals were seen as the supreme model of political life and values, writers such as Josephus and Philo found it vital to compare the 'Jewish constitution' with the Greek one. This was done in order to combat the negative Hellenistic descriptions of the Mosaic law, and at the same time to see the Torah as a constitution, as the Hellenistic writers did.[38]

Surely, the Torah was the law book of Israel. But it was not composed for use according to Greek methods of legalistic interpretation. The legalism of the New Testament scribes and Pharisees arose out of the pressure to interpret the Pentateuch according to the Greek rule of law. This is comparable to the modern pressure to defend the glory of God by subjecting Genesis to the expectations of modern science. In both instances, the result will be a distorted reading of Scripture.

In every era, God's people must resist the allure to prove God by reinterpreting his Word according to the philosophical ideals of the day. This dynamic is not unique to the modern church living in a society enamored with

science. Every age has its particular kinds of authority—a particular philosophy, a kind of power, a political ideal, or (as today) a scientific methodology—that are socially dominant. Today the church is under pressure to explain away the Bible's seemingly quaint treatment of topics now regarded as scientific matters and to provide interpretations of the Bible that demonstrate its scientific sophistication: that "its science is accurate and far in advance of its times, . . . [including] remarkable anticipations of modern science."[39] But such efforts always fail, and frequently backfire.

To cite an example from the other end of the Bible (i.e., the book of Revelation), consider Hal Lindsey's famous string of books from the 1970s through the 1990s about the end times. In them, Lindsey frequently claimed that God gave John visions of modern warfare employing the latest (by which he meant twentieth century) scientific technologies. "How could this first-century man describe the scientific wonders of the latter twentieth century?" Lindsey wrote,

> He had to illustrate them with phenomena of the first century; for instance, a thermonuclear war looked to him like a giant volcanic eruption spewing fire and brimstone. . . . Much of the symbolism John used was the result of a first century man being catapulted in God's time machine up to the end of the twentieth century, then returned to his own time and commanded to write what he had seen and heard.[40]

According to Lindsey, John's description of "locusts . . . [with] breastplates like breastplates of iron, and . . . power to hurt people for five months . . . in their tails" (Rev 9:7-10) was his effort to describe military attack helicopters with tail gunners.[41] The fact that those same locusts also had features unlike a helicopter—such as "hair like women's hair" and "teeth like lions' teeth"—does not dissuade those who get caught up in the search for advanced technology in the Bible. But such hermeneutical contortions serve to demonstrate this point: even in portions of Scripture where promises for the future are being revealed, God consistently speaks within the cultural understanding of the audience. John's apocalyptic vision actually lacks any unveiling of future scientific or technological insights; instead, it speaks of swords and horses and only those pestilences already known in his time.

Likewise, efforts have been made to deduce health insights from Scripture. The dietary laws of Leviticus 11 are a favorite focus for such "health research" using the Bible.[42] It is possible that avoiding pork would have protected the Hebrews from trichinosis, but health benefits can hardly be attached to all the dietary restrictions of Leviticus 11. Furthermore, in the New Testament Jesus removed the dietary laws (Mk 7:19; Acts 10:13), which would seem contradictory if health was their purpose. In fact, nowhere in the Old Testament is there any hint that Israel regarded their dietary laws as a basis for health.[43] Although there have been many efforts of various kinds to credit Scripture with advanced insight for medical treatment, nowhere in the Bible do we actually find God giving breakthrough medical information. It would be prudent to abandon efforts to deduce modern science from the biblical texts.

Mining Genesis for answers to cutting-edge questions about cosmic origins and natural processes, and employing new interpretations to explain away its quaint references to archaic "science," indicates a surrender to this allure. Such efforts are well intentioned but misguided. Scientific interpretations of Genesis distort the text, just as pharisaical legalism in the intertestamental period distorted the Mosaic law.[44] In divine revelation, God imposes heaven's moral and redemptive worldview on humanity, but he consistently leaves untouched the cultural attainments of the peoples to whom he spoke.

Creation Week as a Sabbath Narrative

Although the creation week narrative should not be mined for scientific information, we can use it for its intended purpose as sabbath instruction. Like all the calendar narratives of the Pentateuch, Genesis 1:1–2:3 has a festival in view. Each of the first six days of the creation week is mentioned once. But when the text reaches its climax with the seventh day, "the seventh is mentioned emphatically, three times in three consecutive sentences."[45] The text's emphasis on the seventh day as the major focus of the passage is demonstrated in a number of ways, most importantly by the Lord's consecration of the day.[46]

The true beauty of the creation week is its invitation to sabbath rest. This message of rest is both the demonstrable emphasis of the text and the one major theme of the passage on which the church's voice has been unified through history. From centuries past, there have been many different views on the nature of the creation days. Some church fathers regarded them as metaphorical days and some as actual creation events.[47] The church has long allowed for a variety of opinions regarding the nature of the events described in the creation week. But the focus of the text that has been consistently upheld by the church throughout her history is its message about the sabbath day. Unfortunately, modern fascination to find science in the creation week tends to distract readers from its emphasis on the sabbath day. The allure of worship rather than science ought to be our focus in the study of the creation week.

Robert Godfrey writes, "It is surely ironic that many people today who most insistently claim that it is obvious that the days of Genesis 1 are ordinary twenty-four-hour days miss the most important point about the days, namely, that one day in seven is holy to the Lord."[48] There is actually a good reason why apologetic ministries tend to overlook the sabbath day focus of the creation week. By nature, the agenda of an apologetic ministry is defined by the crisis it exists to address. Today the threat that "secular science" poses to Genesis is aimed only at God's creative works in the six days when "stuff happened." Thus, the major creation apologists—from all perspectives—generally focus on the six days and give little or no attention to the seventh. This is understandable, but it dangerously skews the church's attention away from the text's internal emphasis, which is to labor in anticipation of the weekly sabbath. Several examples will illustrate.

One of the leading apologists for the "literal six-day" view is Ken Ham, founder of Answers in Genesis (AiG). The text that Ken Ham says "represents the essence of the message the Lord has called me to proclaim" is his bestselling book, *The Lie: Evolution/Millions of Years*.[49] This work is an appeal concerning the six creation days, but it lacks attention to the seventh. In fact, the book mentions the seventh day only once,[50] and that reference is included only to show by analogy the twenty-four-hour nature of the other six days.

Another example of this apologetic emphasis that overlooks the seventh day is found in the Reasons to Believe (RTB) ministry led by Hugh Ross. Ross argues for a "day age" view of the creation week, concluding that there are long eons represented by the creation days. His book *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* also focuses on the six days with very little reference to the seventh.[51] There are only three places where Ross's book mentions the seventh day, and each of these focuses on the length of that day, which, in his interpretation, lacks an "evening and morning" and thus is longer than twenty-four hours.[52] Ironically, both Hugh Ross and Ken Ham draw opposite conclusions about the length of the seventh day, while both make reference to that day only as an analogy for the length of the previous six.

There is a similar lack of attention to the seventh day in the representative "evolutionary creation" book from Deborah and Loren Haarsma, *Origins: Christian Perspectives on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design*.[53] Associated with the BioLogos organization, the Haarsmas include a chapter encouraging readers to bring their marvel at God's creation into their worship.[54] But even that chapter lacks reference to the seventh day of the creation week as impetus. The book's only discussion of the seventh day is in reference to the length of the day as understood by the "day age" view.[55]

Even a massive multiauthor volume published by Crossway pays little attention to the seventh day. *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique* is a masterpiece of rigor and insight from twenty-five different scholars, theologians, and philosophers.[56] But the seventh day is almost never part of its discussion. Terms like *epigenetics*, *niche construction*, *polyphyletic view of life*, and *theophany* have been ranked important enough to be in the book's general index, but neither *sabbath* nor *seventh day* nor parallel terms (like *rest*, *worship*, *communion*, or *temple*) are included. Furthermore, the book's Scripture index lists sixty-one page references in which specific verses between Genesis 1:1 and 1:31 (i.e., the six creation days) are discussed, but there is only one page reference for Genesis 2:1-3 (i.e., the seventh day). That referenced page discusses the seventh day "rest" only to argue that creation is a finished process.[57]

These works illustrate the role of apologists who, in times of crisis, appropriately let the crisis define their agenda. Mine is not a point of criticism, on this matter. It is appropriate that these organizations would tailor their message to the challenges of the culture. But unfortunately, these powerful apologetic voices are sometimes treated as the dominant voices on the creation week narrative. One implication has been the decline of attention to the sabbath message in the creation week. The role of apologetics is important to help answer specific challenges, but the message of the creation week narrative is about much more than proving that God is the Creator and that modern science need not threaten Christian faith. Those are important aims, which the aforementioned apologists each approach in different ways, but the church needs to do more with these texts than answer the challenges of science. We need to hear the text's central message about laboring before God as his stewards and communing with him in sabbath worship.

The burden of the present volume is to restore emphasis on the pastoral function of the creation week. Scientific curiosity and argument has distracted us from the actual function and beauty of the creation week. It is a passage designed to draw our hearts to worship with eternal hope. Taking my cue from the fourth commandment and drawing on the broader Torah pattern of dated narratives, I want to contribute toward the practical use of the creation week as a Torah calendar narrative that serves as another festival guide—this one being designed to help us "remember the sabbath."



THE PLOT OF THE CREATION WEEK

WHETHER SHOPPING AT AN UNFAMILIAR mall or hiking on vacation at a national park, it is usually a good idea to begin at the map posted by the entrance. One finds the "you are here" arrow and then gets a sense of the overall layout before launching into the hallways or trailways ahead. In this chapter, I want to provide such a "big picture" orientation to the plot of the creation week narrative. The creation week has two main structural dimensions that move the storyline forward, each of which can be captured in a simple math sentence.

The primary structure of the calendar is visualized by the formula 6 + 1 = 7. The narrative shows us six ordinary days followed by one set apart as holy. The secondary structure of the passage takes the six ordinary days and organizes them into panels of three. This can be expressed in the second formula: 3 + 3 = 6. We might, therefore, visualize the overall structure of the creation week in the expression (3 + 3) + 1 = 7. Orienting ourselves to those overarching structures and related themes in this chapter will provide helpful perspective before we launch into each of the seven days in subsequent chapters.

The Shape of the Week (6 + 1 = 7)

The creation week calendar has two major sections, each with its own focus. The first focus is *labor,* presented in the opening block of six days (Gen 1:1-31). The second is *rest,* identified in the Lord's rest on the seventh day (Gen 2:1-3).

The climax of the theme of labor is the creation of humankind, to whom God gave dominion over all that he made (Gen 1:26-30). But the basis for that

dominion is humankind's creation "in the image of God" (v. 27). Everything revealed about the wisdom and beauty of God in his labors during those six workdays is a model for human stewardship of the created order. In other words, the focus of all six of the creation days is actually to instruct *human* labor through the model of God himself. That focus of the six days is confirmed by the Decalogue's command: "Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, . . . for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (Ex 20:8-11). The Lord's work on the six days is a model for humanity's ongoing stewardship of his world.

The second major focus is rest, which is introduced with the seventh day. The seventh is a different kind of day from the preceding six. It is a "holy day," sanctified by God after finishing his work of the other six days (2:1-3). This rest is not merely kicking back to relax, however. It is a holy day for the image bearers to commune with the Creator. This theme is also identified by the fourth commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . The seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God" (Ex 20:8-10).

Israel had many festival days throughout the year, only some of which required a cessation from work to assemble for worship. For example, the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Booths were both weeklong festivals. But only on the first and last days of those festivals were the people told "you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work" (Lev 23:7-8, 35-36). On the intervening days, the people worked as well as feasted. The term *sabbath* (*šabbāt* or *šabbātôn*)[1] indicates a holiday from work in order to gather for worship (Lev 23:3).[2] The creation narrative does not use the word *sabbath*, but the fourth commandment ensures we recognize it there.

The two major applications of the weekly calendar are human stewardship through six days (like God, the Model Workman) and human rest on the seventh day (with God, the Resting One). This "6 + 1 = 7" structure is universally recognized. Guided by the fourth commandment, the church has long understood that the creation narrative is a guide for the human cadence of labor and worship.[3] What some dispute is whether the narrative is also a journalistic, "blow by blow" record of the actual order and timing in which God did the

works of creation. Most historical narratives would need to be read that way. But we have seen in this book that the Torah adapts historical narratives to the dates of festival calendars for the sake of observance, not chronology. The creation week is another narrative ascribed with observance dates that do not preserve the original occurrence timeline.

God was pleased to take an entire generation (represented as "forty years") to bring the people of Israel from Egypt to the border of the Promised Land, and another five hundred years before finally giving them rest in that land (2 Sam 7:1). Nevertheless, the Lord put the remembrance of that centuries-long history into the liturgy of a one-year calendar (from Passover to Booths) that was structured around the people's agricultural harvests (Lev 23:1-44). The timing was governed by festivals, not history. It is the same with the Genesis 1:1–2:3 creation narrative. The actual timing of creation can no more be determined from the sabbath-week calendar than the actual timing of Israel's settlement in the land from their annual pilgrimage calendar. The six-and-one formula of the creation narrative brings the remembrance of God's creative work to bear on the cadence of Israel's sabbath week.

The Shape of the Workweek (3 + 3 = 6)

Within the overarching six-and-one formula of the seven-day week there is a secondary three-and-three formula for the six-day workweek. It is a structure that emphasizes the God-ordained fruitfulness of the world provided through human labor. Notice how the theme of "fruitfulness" is encoded into the six days of the creation week calendar.

The need for fruitfulness. The workweek's theme of fruitfulness is introduced by its absence at the outset. The narrative begins, "The earth was without form and void [*tōhû wābōhû*]" (Gen 1:2). This is not an ancient scientific insight into the chaotic form of the early earth.[4] The phrase describes a barren wilderness, unfruitful and incapable of hosting life (cf. Deut 32:10; Is 34:11; 45:18; Jer 4:23). It stirs up images of the kind of wild territory on the boundaries of many household farms that needed to be turned into arable fields

as the family grew. It is a description that would evoke a sense of relevance for citizens of Israel, who had no awareness of primordial cosmic chaos but plenty of experience with unfruitful regions of wilderness.

The prophet Isaiah points to this passage and concludes, "The LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), . . . [he] formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty [*tōhû*], he formed it to be inhabited!)" (Is 45:18). The barrenness of the world's initial state serves as the backdrop to show us the condition to which the land might return apart from God's care and to assure us of the fruitfulness he ordered the world to provide. The barren scape that God faced, however, was the ultimate frontier of barrenness—a *watery* wilderness (cf. the flood; Gen 6–9). But the phrase "without form and void" (*tōhû wābōhû*) evokes the image of wildernesses yet to be made fruitful.

The first term, *tōhû* ("without form"), refers particularly to a lack of order—the absence of the necessary conditions for fruitfulness. The second term, *bōhû* ("void" or "empty"), refers to the barrenness that results from that lack of order.[5] The narrative's presenting problem is a world that is unfruitful because it is disordered. The six creation days answer that troubled condition in two blocks of three days each.

Fruitfulness provided and enjoyed. The first triad (days one, two, and three) describes the provision of order that leads to the required fruitfulness. The end of day three describes the achievement of that fruitfulness (Gen 1:11-13). The *tōhû wābōhû* condition is reversed within the first three days. Once the earth is thus able to sustain life, the latter three days (days four, five, and six) insert residents into the fruitful world. The sixth day is capped off with permission for these residents to eat of the world's fruitfulness (Gen 1:29-31). Thus, God's paradigm workweek is structured around a simple plot of labor to bring fruitfulness (days one through three) and feasting (days four through six).[6] (And then the sabbath day brings that feasting into communion with God.)

The first three workdays are the days of ordering to make the world fruitful and are distinguished by God's naming activity. God gives names to things only on the first three days. He names the day and the night on day one, the heavens on day two, and both land and seas on day three. These are the ordered divisions

of three realms: time, the heavens, and this world.[7] God accomplishes this ordering by repeatedly "separating" (Gen 1:4, 6, 7) and "gathering" (Gen 1:9, 10). Only once does God "make" something during the first three days. On day two, "God made [*ʿāśâ*] the firmament and [with it] separated the waters" (Gen 1:7, a.t.). On that occasion, God made an instrument whereby he separated the waters above from those below. (See the discussion of day two in "Day Two: Heavens" in chapter 9.) Even that singular act of making was for the purpose of putting things into their proper places. The first panel of days is about the ordering of realms necessary for the world to become fruitful.

The origin of matter and energy that constitute the universe can be inferred from the events of days one, two, and three.[8] God is the one by whom everything that exists came into being (Jn 1:1-3; Heb 11:3). But the burden of the text is on preparing a fruitful domain rather than explaining the origin of matter. For example, despite the inauguration of *light* on day one (thereby creating a new thing), the text focuses on the realms ordered by that light: day and night (Gen 1:5). The first three days are not concerned to document the invention of photons, soil, or H_2O, but to show the ordering of domains for a fruitful world. The conclusion of the first panel, at the end of day three, is a statement of fruitfulness achieved. "And God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit. . . .' And it was so" (Gen 1:11). Fruitfulness is achieved by the ordering of the first three days.

In the second panel (days four, five, and six), God increases his making of things: "God made [*ʿāśâ*] the two great lights" (Gen 1:16); "God created [*bārāʾ*] the great sea creatures" (v. 21); "God made [*ʿāśâ*] the beasts of the earth" (v. 25); "'Let us make [*ʿāśâ*] man in our image.' . . . So God created [*bārāʾ*] man" (Gen 1:26-27). The creative work of God permeates the entire week (cf. Gen 1:1, 31), but it is in the formation of the stars and the animals that God is specifically said to be "making" things. And he places each of these created beings into their proper realm.

The birds were assigned to multiply on the earth and to fly in the heavens (Gen 1:20, 22), the sea creatures were granted a place in the waters (vv. 21-22),

and the beasts were placed on the earth (vv. 24-25). Each of these had an assigned realm within the order established during the previous three days. But humanity was granted dominion over all of these creatures in all of their realms: "Let [humans] have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen 1:26; also v. 28). This special assignment to humanity indicates responsibility. God has been at work giving the world its order to make it fruitful as well as making creatures to be nurtured by those fruits. Humanity is then appointed to stewardship, as vicegerents to continue the world's fruitfulness and nurture.

The conclusion of the second panel authorizes humans and all the creatures to eat from the world's bounty. "And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on 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 heavens'" (Gen 1:29-30).

Thus, the six days of God's model labors are ordered into parallel three-day panels. Those panels show the purpose of God's ordering the world as being one of fruitfulness and nurture. Scholars have long noted the parallelism between the first three days and the second three days.[9] These two panels are widely discussed by others, and in fact their presence is indicated within the text itself: "Thus the heavens and the earth [i.e., the ordered realms of days one through three] were finished, and all the host of them [i.e., the residents for each of those realms in days four through six]" (Gen 2:1). But the structuring of the six days around the themes of fruitfulness and feasting is not typically recognized. Let me therefore offer some further explanation to demonstrate the *structural* integrity of this theme.

Built around fruitfulness. The annual festivals were structured around the harvests of the land. It should not surprise us to find a similar focus on farming and fruitfulness behind the sabbath calendar. But the references to fruitfulness are often treated as incidental to the creation narrative. There are two features of the text, however, that indicate the importance of fruitfulness as central to the plot of the creation week story.

The first is the previously discussed phrase, “without form and void [*tōhû wābōhû*]” (Gen 1:2). The opening problem that the narrative resolves is a lack of fruitfulness due to a lack of order. The second is the placement of “status updates” at the close of each panel of the story. The third day is the end of the first three-day panel, and it ends with a statement of the world’s newfound fruitfulness (Gen 1:11-13). The sixth day is the end of the second three-day panel, and it ends with a statement of the creatures’ eating from the world’s fruits (Gen 1:29-31). Normally these statements about fruitfulness at the close of days three and six are treated as events of those days without realizing their significance within the larger narrative plot. However, there are structural markers in the text that indicate the importance of these two statements as “status updates” within the plot line introduced by the opening *tōhû wābōhû* problem.

The six days are punctuated with divine proclamations of “goodness.” There is a sevenfold repetition of the announcement “And God saw that it was good” (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). But these seven pronouncements are not placed evenly throughout the six days. Aesthetically, it might seem attractive to place one of these statements on each of the six days, with the climactic seventh declaration added prior to the seventh day. However, day two is curiously left without any mention of goodness. Whatever the reason for selecting day two (rather than, say, day five) for that omission, the result is significant. A total count of seven proclamations of goodness is retained, allowing for a doubling of the announcement on both days three and six—the final days of the two panels. (See table 8.1 below, with the following explanation.)

	Realms *("heavens and earth")*		Residents *("all their hosts")*	
DAY 1	Day and Night **"GOD SAW THAT THE LIGHT WAS GOOD."**	↔	Sun, Moon and Stars **"GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD."**	**DAY 1**
DAY 2	Heavens (between the waters)	↔	Birds and Fish **"GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD."**	**DAY 2**
DAY 3	Land and Seas **"GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD."**	↔	Animals **"GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD."**	**DAY 3**
	"Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." **"GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD."**		Humans (to steward/farm) *"Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food."* **"BEHOLD, IT WAS VERY GOOD."**	

Figure 8.1. Structure of the six days

Days three and six each begin with the work proper to that day, punctuated with a typical statement of goodness that closes a day's work. The work of day three ends, "And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' . . . *And God saw that it was good*" (Gen 1:9-10). The work of day six ends, "And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds.' . . . *And God saw that it was good*" (Gen 1:24-25). But those two days each have an additional paragraph after the "God saw that it was good" conclusion. Those addenda are each sealed with a further "and God saw that it was good" statement. Those addenda on days three and six are thereby set apart as status updates on the goodness being brought forth through the week. And it is, in particular, goodness that enables fruitfulness.

After the good work of days one through three were finished, the following is now possible: “God said, ‘Let the earth sprout vegetation.’ . . . *And God saw that it was good*” (Gen 1:11-12). Similarly, after the good work of creating the animals was finished on days four through six, the following is possible: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man . . . [to] have dominion . . . over all the earth.’ . . . And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed . . . for food. And to every beast of the earth.’ . . . *And behold, it was very good*” (Gen 1:26-31).

Structurally, each of the residents in days four, five, and six are paired with the realms ordered in days one, two, and three. But humanity is introduced in the addenda on day six, with dominion over all the realms (of days one through three) and all the animals (of days four through six). Similarly, the fruitfulness reports in those addenda are status updates on the overarching narrative’s plot line. The placement of the “goodness” pronouncements reinforces the special function of these addenda at the close of days three and six. They are not merely events on the days in which they occur. They reveal the story’s progress toward the full resolution of the opening “problem” of a world that is *tōhû wābōhû*. John Walton has argued persuasively that the creation week’s primary concern is with establishing order (Walton speaks of “functions”) rather than the invention of material “stuff.”[10] I concur but would add that the text points to a particular purpose for the order instilled into it: namely, to make the land fruitful, and in that fruitfulness to enable all creation to feast (that is, to thrive).

Critically, then, the sabbath follows as the crowning day of the week (Gen 2:2-3). The sabbath draws humanity—with each week’s bounty (cf. Ex 16:5, 22)—to “rest” (implicitly with feasting) before God. In this manner, the creation week calendar offers practical guidance for the labor and worship of the common Hebrew household. The text is not a lofty description about galaxy formation and other phenomena of little use to the average Israelite scraping out a living from the land. It is a practical calendar that encourages the people to understand their labors as “cooperation” with the Lord. The people are serving as stewards in the heritage of his good work as they daily manage the ordered realms of their fields and vineyards and gardens amid the surrounding wild

lands, to advance and bring forth the fruitfulness of the land for their own nurture and that of their livestock, with respect also for the surrounding wildlife (Ex 23:11; Lev 25:7; cf. Gen 9:9-10; Lev 17:4; Deut 22:6). As the people weekly present themselves before the Lord, sabbath by sabbath, they do so as stewards of the land ordered and allotted to them by their heavenly king.[11]

The Creator's Character

Before turning attention to each specific day of the creation week, a final word needs to be said about the Creator himself. God is revealed in every stage of this narrative as a being of great power. His might is indisputable. In fact, his title in this chapter is *ʾĕlōhîm* (usually translated "God"), which means "All-powerful One."[12] The power of God is evident. But it is noteworthy that the passage actually says very little about his power. Instead we are chiefly drawn to behold God's goodness and wisdom.

Our first clue is in the exclusive reference to his *words* as his means of creation. There are other passages in the Bible that focus on the "hand" and "arm" of God at work in his creating. To speak of God creating by his hand is to focus on his power. For example, Jeremiah proclaims, "Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you" (Jer 32:17; cf. Jer 27:5). The psalmist also exalts God's power by singing, "I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers" (Ps 8:3). Even within the broader Genesis creation narrative, God is said to have picked up dirt to fashion the man, to have surgically removed and manipulated the man's rib to make a woman (Gen 2:7, 21-22), and to have "formed [*yāṣar*, 'to sculpt or fashion;' cf. Is 29:16] every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens" (Gen 2:19; cf. Gen 1:20, 24, where the same creatures are said to have been created by God's word).

It is biblical to speak of God creating by the might of his hand and the skill of his fingers. It is a mistake to favor statements about verbal creation in Genesis 1 and conclude that all the other references to God creating by his hands must not be taken just as seriously. The fact is, God is a Spirit and does not have

hands and fingers, but neither does he have vocal cords. All of these expressions of his creative methods are anthropomorphic descriptions designed to highlight key aspects of the Creator's character, not journalistic descriptions of his anatomy or his techniques. Where God is said to create by his hands, it is his power or his skill that is set forth. Where his word is the focus, as in Genesis 1:1–2:3, it is his wisdom we are drawn to admire. In the creation week narrative, God's creation by word is presented. The regular references to God's "making" things (Gen 1:7, 16, 21, 25, 26, 27) may infer the kind of manual activity that is expressed in other Old Testament texts.[13] However, the emphasis of Genesis 1 is on his creative word. This feature showcases his wisdom (Ps 33:6-11; cf. Prov 8:22-31).[14]

The creation week narrative also showcases God's goodness. Step by step through the creation week, we encounter the repeated refrain, "And God saw that it was good" (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). God's immense power and victory are inferred, but it is the wisdom and goodness of his works that are put front and center. This is important to note since Genesis 1 is describing qualities of God that humankind is to reflect as his stewards.

The kind of dominion humankind is to exercise week by week is not a brute tyranny but rather a wise and good governance of the world, upholding its order and drawing out its God-instilled fruitfulness. Certainly a lot of heft and effort is required in human labor. But humans are not the strongest creatures God made on earth. In fact, Psalm 8 marvels that God chose to grant dominion to humankind despite our smallness and weakness compared to the immensity and power of other aspects of creation. Human labor will require strength and arduous effort. However, it is the good, moral wisdom of God that humanity is uniquely equipped to reflect in stewardship of the world (Prov 8:22-36; cf. Deut 4:1-2, 6-8).[15] Even the way God is described in the creation week is not a comprehensive description of how he created things, but instead offers an eloquent model for how humans are to reflect his likeness in our week-by-week stewardship of his creation.

Conclusion

The structural features and plot dimensions we have looked at in this chapter introduce the practical character of the creation narrative. The creation week narrative is not a scientific report detailing the processes of natural origins. It is more like a "farmer's almanac," a guide for the Hebrew farmer to work and worship each week as God's steward.

Hebrew Bible scholar Philippe Guillaume has recently pointed out an additional feature embedded in the creation week's structure that indicates its calendrical purpose. Guillaume has pointed out that the opening day of each panel is about time. Day one introduces the creation of day and night, the fundamental rhythms of time. Day four introduces the heavenly lights, which regulate the rhythms of time. The whole passage began with the temporal marker, "In the beginning," and it ends with the institution of the sabbath day. Guillaume concludes, "The Sabbath and Gen 1 are the creation of . . . a sacred calendar. . . . The first, fourth and seventh days are devoted exclusively to the creation of rhythms."[16]

Christians today respond to the biblical sabbath in many different ways. Some churches hold to the continuation of a seventh-day sabbath. Others believe that Jesus' resurrection requires a change of the sabbath to the first day of the week. Still others hold that the sabbath is no longer required of Christians but that its principle is still important. There are many different ways in which contemporary Christians regard the sabbath, and determining the proper implications of the fourth commandment today is important. In this book, however, I have been focusing on the expectations of the text within its Old Testament context. And for the Hebrew congregation, the creation narrative provided sabbath festival guidance—not scientific insight.



ORDERED FOR FRUITFULNESS (DAYS 1–3)

DURING THE FIRST THREE DAYS, the Creator put the world's realms into order (Gen 1:1-12). When rightly ordered (no longer *tōhû*, "without form," v. 2), the world thrives and is fruitful (no longer *bōhû*, "empty," v. 2; cf. vv. 11-13). In this chapter, we will look more closely at days one through three. As will become evident, however, the text makes no effort to provide an education on the natural sciences.

Those who believe the accuracy of Scripture means it will employ modern scientific insight will find several observations in this chapter unsettling. However, I write with a commitment to listen to the Scriptures for what they say, even when it condescends to speak within the physical worldview of its ancient audience. I view such condescension to be a mark of God's love. The Scriptures are pastoral in their design rather than exhibitionist. The Lord does not parade his divine insight into scientific matters tertiary to the saving message of the text. These texts were written to guide the common worshiper in weekly life, not to "plant breadcrumbs" for scientific researchers.

Prologue

> *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*
>
> GENESIS 1:1-2

Some regard this prologue as an independent creation event. Proponents of the Gap Theory hold that God first created the raw materials of the heavens and the earth. Then billions of years of natural processes left a world that was "without form and void." At that point, the Spirit of God intervened to conduct the six days of creation. Some Young Earth Creationists also read these verses as a distinct act of creation but treat them as part of the work of day one. The first verse is not a distinct creation act, however, but is best read as an introduction to the creation week.[1] In fact, these verses are the opening half of an inclusio that frames the whole story. "God created the heavens and the earth" at the front (1:1) is mirrored by "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished" (2:1) at the close. That closing line is not adding another event to the week, and neither is the opening line.

The importance of these framing summaries is their totality. They emphasize the universal scope of God's creation. "Heavens and earth" is a merism that means heaven, earth, and everything in and between them. Furthermore, the creation of the heavens takes place on day two (Gen 1:8), and the creation of earth (i.e., land) on day three (v. 10). It is best to regard verse 1 as an opening title for the account rather than a distinct creation act.

Some interpreters find this conclusion unsatisfying because it means the opening act of creation on day one presupposes a chaotic earth already in existence (v. 2). The creation narrative begins not with "nothingness" but with a dark and watery world. If verse 1 is an introduction and not an event, then Genesis 1 never reports the origin of the initial "stuff" of the cosmos. That is

troubling for those expecting an account of the absolute first origin of physical matter. That Genesis does not answer that question is our first indication that this chapter is not designed to address scientific concerns.[2] The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is still implied by this passage and is explicit in other parts of the Bible (e.g., Jn 1:3; Col 1:16-17; Heb 11:3).[3] But the origins of protons and neutrons is not the concern of the creation week calendar. The concern of this text is much less philosophical.[4] "The earth was without form and void [*tōhû wābōhû*]" (Gen 1:2). The unfruitfulness of the world, not the origin of its rocks and water molecules, is the concern introduced by the passage.[5]

This is a beginning point that would have been relevant to every Hebrew laborer looking out over a dry, stone-filled wilderness field or sitting over the raw wool or clay in his workshop at the beginning of another workweek. God chose to begin the creation week story in a scenario to which the worshiping audience could relate, though on a much grander scale that leaves us in awe at his work and inspired in our much smaller estate tasks.

Wonderfully, the barrenness of the world had a solution at hand. "The Spirit of God was hovering [*məraḥepet*] over the face of the waters" (Gen 1:2). The verb *hovering* (*rāḥap*) indicates God's presence and care, like a mother bird that hovers over its young (cf. Deut 32:11; Is 45:11-18).[6] The imagery draws on the Israelites' experience watching wildlife; it is not a divine revelation about "prebiotic soup"[7] or "waves of gravitational energy"[8] organizing molecules.

Day One: Day and Night

> *And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*
>
> GENESIS 1:3-5

The first day introduces the rhythms of day and night, essential for human labor and the world's fruitfulness. The introduction of light launches day one, but light is not the focus. Neither is the text focused on the origin of time in its abstract

sense (or as “the fourth dimension” of space). The day’s focus is on the concrete experience of day and night, familiar to the ordering of life for every Hebrew family. Note how the designation *good* is ascribed only to the daytime. It is the daylight (and not darkness, at least within an ancient Hebrew worldview) that is essential for the earth to become fruitful; therefore, the daytime is good within the creation narrative’s plot line. The whole twenty-four-hour cycle of day and night is a display of God’s goodness. But it is strictly the daytime that is good within the agricultural interests of this narrative (Ps 104:21-23).[9]

The passage closes with the day’s number. “There was evening and there was morning, one day [*yôm ʾeḥād*]” (Gen 1:5, a.t.). The text uses ordinal numbers for the other days of the creation week: “second day” (v. 8), “third day” (v. 13), “fourth day” (v. 19), and so forth. Only the first day uses a cardinal number, translated literally as “one day” rather than “first day.” Scholars have long debated the significance of this unusual wording choice, with some remarkable suggestions, but the most likely reason is fairly mundane. Andrew Steinmann explains,

> This [construction] is especially needed in this verse, since “day” is used in two senses in this one verse. Its first occurrence means the time during the daily cycle that is illuminated by daylight (as opposed to “night”). The second use means something different, a time period that encompasses both the time of daylight and the time of darkness [i.e., the full twenty-four-hour day].[10]

In other words, the phrase *one day* is used to convey the sense “whole day” (i.e., day and night) as distinct from the twelve-hour day God had just appointed.

Day Two: Heavens

> *And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.*
>
> GENESIS 1:6-8

The events of day two are especially difficult to reckon with a scientific model of the world. Many modern translations use the word *expanse* for that which God interposed between "the waters that were under the expanse [*rāqîaʿ*]" and "the waters that were above the expanse [*rāqîaʿ*]" (Gen 1:7).[11] The translation "expanse" adapts the text to a modern, scientific understanding of the atmosphere. But the word favored by premodern translations, *firmament*, is closer to the Hebrew.[12] In the premodern world, the visual appearance of the sky, which looks like a blue dome, was taken to be one. It seems strange today, steeped as we are in modern discoveries about the distance of stars and the vastness of outer space. But step outside on a bright afternoon and try to take a fresh look at the sky. The air immediately around you is not blue, but "up there" the distant arch over the earth is crystalline blue. And at night, the stars appear to be dotting the sky at that same distance. Prior to telescopes, the presence of a firmament (*rāqîaʿ*) seemed as obvious as the blue sky.[13] The Holy Spirit guided the author of Genesis to describe God's workmanship within that prescientific worldview rather than baffling his people with anachronistic insights into atmospheric and astronomical sciences.

The Hebrew term *rāqîaʿ* consistently refers to a physical surface that has been stretched out, like fabric stretched over a frame or like "hammered out gold leaf" (Ex 39:3; cf. Num 16:38). The Genesis text says that God "made" or "fashioned" (*ʿāśâ*) the *rāqîaʿ* in the heavens, indicating that something material was "stretched out" by him (Ps 104:2). Paul Seely explains,

> Standard Hebrew lexica . . . have defined the *raqiaʿ* (רקיע, "firmament") of Gen 1:6–8 as a solid dome over the earth . . . Only by taking Genesis 1 out of its historical context could one say that *raqiaʿ* means merely 'an atmospheric expanse' or, as the more sophisticated conservatives say, "just phenomenal language." In the ancient world the sky was not just phenomenal. The ancients did not just refer to the appearance of the sky as being solid. They concluded from the appearance that the sky really was solid . . . The *raqiaʿ* was for them a literal physical part of the universe, just as solid as the earth itself.[14]

Some scholars have tried to show that *rāqîaʿ*, at least as used in the creation account, does not refer to a physical dome.[15] However, within the Bible itself there is confirmation the day two *rāqîaʿ* should be read as a physical vault.

Psalm 104:2 reflects on creation day two with the words, "stretch[ed] out the heavens like a tent." And the author of Job, reflecting on creation day two, wrote, "Can you, like him, spread out [*rāqaʿ*] the skies, hard as a cast metal mirror?" (Job 37:18). This perception is pervasive in the Bible. Exodus describes an encounter with God on Mount Sinai as a climb high enough to reach the dome of heaven and see through it to the feet of God: "There was under [God's] feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness" (Ex 24:10). In that instance, God revealed "his feet" within the cultural expectations that his throne rested on the dome over the earth. Ezekiel saw a similar vision of God's throne on top of a crystalline dome:

> Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse [*rāqîaʿ*], shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads. And under the expanse [*rāqîaʿ*] their wings were stretched out. . . . And there came a voice from above the expanse [*rāqîaʿ*] over their heads. . . . And above the expanse [*rāqîaʿ*] over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was . . . the likeness of the glory of the LORD. (Ezek 1:22-28; cf. Ezek 10:1; Ps 104:1-3, 13) [16]

The day two narrative envisions a physical vault fashioned by God, inserted into the midst of the waters, and then elevated to heft half of the waters into a suspended position over the earth. The description is like a knife slicing into a dinner roll, and then lifting the upper half of the roll from over the lower half. [17] The firmament installed on day two is the backdrop for events on other creation days also. The heavenly lights were thought to be suspended from the heavenly dome, traveling on their courses across its surface. Thus on day four God states, "Let there be lights *in* the firmament [*birqîaʿ*] of the heavens" (Gen 1:14, a.t.), and on day five the birds were said to fly "*across the face of* the firmament of the heavens [*ʿal-pənê rəqîaʿ haššāmāyim*]" (Gen 1:20, a.t.). [18]

Modern scientific tools have enabled humans to examine the skies—and even to visit them! We now know that there is no physical vault in the heavens. If, therefore, we were to judge the accuracy of the Bible by the degree to which the Spirit gave the prophets advanced scientific insight, then Genesis 1:6-8 needs to be added to a long list of problem texts. But here, as throughout the Bible, the

Scriptures reveal heaven's truths within the language and conventions of the original audience.

Moving beyond the firmament, the day two passage introduces a second problem for those seeking scientific precision in the text. Day two envisions a world with a store of water overhead, comparable to the sea of water below. In the ancient worldview, it was thought that rain came from those heavenly "storehouses" when God opened "the windows of heaven" (see Gen 7:11; 2 Kgs 7:2, 19; Ps 78:23; 135:7; Is 24:18; Mal 3:10). We now understand that not to be correct. Nevertheless, in an effort to show the creation narrative to be scientifically expressed, some have argued the creation of a "canopy" of water that no longer exists because it was drained for Noah's flood.[19] The canopy interpretation has fallen out of favor today. Bodie Hodge explains,

> Currently, the pitfalls of the canopy model have grown to such an extent that most researchers have abandoned the model. For example, if a canopy existed and collapsed at the time of the Flood to supply the rainfall, the latent heat of condensation would have boiled the atmosphere! . . . Aside from the scientific analysis, there may be a much bigger issue at play: if the canopy really was part of earth's atmosphere, then all the stars, sun, and moon would have been created within the earth's atmosphere. Why is this? A closer look at Genesis 1:14 reveals that the "waters above" may very well be much farther out—if they still exist today. The entirety of the stars, including our own sun (the greater light) and moon (lesser light) could not possibly be in our atmosphere, since they were made "in the expanse" [Gen 1:15].[20]

Another way to explain the waters above the heavens (and above the sun, moon, and stars) is advanced by James Patrick Holding:

> What, then, are these "waters"? We agree . . . that these are not clouds. Rather, it is our suggestion that these "waters" were the originally-created, basic building blocks of matter that the earth was made from, and otherwise became all that was created outside of our atmosphere and/or our solar system. We would hardly expect the author of Genesis to make distinctions between things like stellar matter, methane gas, asteroids, comets, etc. A simple elemental term, "waters," would be sufficient . . . The term "waters" would serve in the minds of the pre-scientific just as "blood" stood for whatever actual substance[!] the Nile became.[21]

This admission is quite stunning! Holding acknowledges that Genesis 1 locates the "waters above" over the sun, moon, and stars (cf. Ps 148:3-4). But in order to maintain the scientific viability of that reading, he proceeds to *deny* a literal

reading of the terms *firmament* and *waters*. It is better to abandon the supposition that Genesis offers scientific revelation and instead allow terms like *firmament* and *waters above* and *lights in the firmament* to have their natural import as well as terms like *day*, *evening*, and *morning*.[22]

The assignment of a name to the firmament, "the heavens" (*šāmayim*), is the climax of this creation day.[23] Day two describes the establishment of the heavens as a structure with stored rainwater ready to deliver. Rain from above—which is essential for the land's fruitfulness—is the real focus of day two.

Excursus: Augustine and Luther on the Second Day

The challenges that the second day poses for a scientific reading of Genesis are particularly pronounced. A closer look at the Genesis commentaries of two prominent theologians—Augustine and Martin Luther—illustrates honest efforts to come to grips with Genesis as literal history yet admitting their inability to make the fit.

Augustine (AD 354–430) detailed his views on natural origins in a commentary called *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. In his arguments regarding the second day, Augustine wrote, "Many hold that the waters mentioned in this place cannot be above the starry heaven, maintaining that they [the waters] would be compelled by their weight to flow down upon the earth."[24] In Augustine's day, it was generally believed that the universe was composed of four basic elements: earth, water, air, and fire. Earth is the heaviest since it sinks lower than water. Fire is the lightest since its heat always rises up, even through the air. There was no conception of the world as enclosed in an atmosphere, nor did people in that day conceive of such a thing as outer space that was qualitatively different than the atmosphere. Within this period conception, Augustine struggled to determine how it can be that Genesis 1:7 identifies a realm of water (which is supposed to be heavier than air) suspended over the heavens, even higher than the stars (which are fire and should rise above water and air).

Initially, Augustine begins his explanation with words of sovereign possibility: “If God ever wished oil to remain under water, it would do so.”[25] In other words, if it was God’s desire that an element would act unnaturally—in this case, that water would rise above even air and fire and remain there—he could decree it so. However, while admitting the absolute sovereignty of God, Augustine insisted, “No one should argue . . . by appealing to the power of God, to whom all is possible, and saying that all ought to believe that water, even though it had the same weight as the water we know by experience, was poured forth over the region of the heavens in which the stars are set.”[26] In other words, Augustine was not content with a “God of the gaps” argument. He believed that the Creator who established the laws of nature built his creation order in a manner consistent with the laws of nature.

Augustine thereafter draws on scientific experimentation concerning the relationship between air and water.

> Air, however, belongs above water. . . . This is clear from the fact that a jar placed upside down into water cannot fill up, thus clearly showing that air by its nature seeks a higher place. . . . But place the jar so that the mouth is not downward but to the side, and the water will flow in below while the air escapes above.[27]

Through such experimentation, Augustine affirms the natural place of earth at the lowest point, water as over the earth, air as asserting a place above the water, and fire as seeking the highest regions of all.

But he then adds another piece of observational data. “The clouds, according to the testimony of those who have walked through them in the mountains, have [a] vaporous appearance, formed, as they are, of the most minute drops which are gathered and rolled together.”[28] In a vaporous state, water can be suspended by the air itself. Augustine concludes,

> This painstaking enquiry is, in my opinion, quite praiseworthy; for the theory advanced is not contrary to the faith, and it makes it possible for one to accept the evidence at hand. . . . If water, as is obvious, can be divided into drops so small that it moves up in vapors above the air, which is lighter by nature than water, why could it not exist also above that purer heaven [of fire] on high in still smaller drops and lighter mists?[29]

He thus concludes that the best explanation of the waters over the heavens is the presence of a superfine mist somewhere overhead, beyond the sun, moon, and stars. The church father ends his argument, "Whatever the nature of that water and whatever the manner of its being there, we must not doubt that it does exist in that place [i.e., the waters located above the heavenly lights]. The authority of Scripture in this matter is greater than all human ingenuity."[30]

Over a thousand years later, Martin Luther (1483–1546) also endeavored to make sense of the waters located over the heavens. Like Augustine, Luther accepted the four basic elements and their natural order—earth, water, air, and fire—as the best model period science could offer:

> These ideas, to be sure, are not certain; nevertheless, they are useful for teaching because they are the result of plausible reasoning and contain the foundation for the arts. Therefore it would be boorish to pay no attention to them or to regard them with contempt, especially since in some respects they are in agreement with experience.[31]

Luther shared Augustine's confidence that God is free to suspend the natural order if he so wills, creating even fire that burns in the midst of the sea if he saw fit. Thus, the observed laws of nature are not to be regarded as limitations of what Genesis teaches about the created order. Nevertheless, as far as what is read can be explained by what is experienced, we should endeavor to do so. With these principles laid out, Luther sorts through a series of efforts to explain the nature of the waters said to stand above the heavens. He reviews the interpretations of "the philosophers," of "more recent theologians," of the Greeks, those of Ambrose and Augustine, the arguments of Averroes, those from Aristotle, and so forth. Throughout Luther's examination of these various explanations, he repeatedly dismisses them with remarks like, "these are childish ideas," "[I cannot] give approval to those inept thoughts," and "other rather silly and rationalistic ideas."

He then tells us the leading view of the church in his time: "The majority of the theologians . . . have interpreted these waters to be the icy heaven, which was placed in that area in order to keep the lower spheres moist and, as it were, to keep them cool, so that they may not be consumed by their excessive heat."[32] The day's leading theologians thought the heavenly spheres were liable to melt

from the friction of their movements through the heavens (thought to be air) at such great speeds. Frozen waters above would provide the necessary refrigeration to maintain the heavens. But Luther finds these explanations difficult to accept. At the end of his survey of extant opinions, Luther cannot find any explanation for the waters above the heavens that satisfies him: "I shall readily confess that I do not know what these waters are."[33]

The stalwart Reformer admits that he would like to interpret the text differently than he reads it:

> I might readily imagine that the firmament is the uppermost mass of all and that the waters which are in suspension, not over but under the heaven, are the clouds that we observe . . . But Moses says in plain words that the waters were above and below the firmament. Here I, therefore, take my reason captive and subscribe to the Word even though I do not understand it.[34]

Luther's honest admission that Genesis plainly locates the heavenly waters above the sun, moon, and stars—despite the massive obstacle that creates for a scientific explanation of the waters—is refreshing. But with our modern understanding of the nature of outer space and the great distance of the numerous stars, the problem of identifying a scientific interpretation for these waters above the heavenly lights is even greater now than it was for Augustine and Luther.

Augustine and Luther illustrate efforts to interpret the creation week as actual descriptions. There were also those in the history of the church who did not read the text that way, and it now seems that other approaches were better than those attempted by the likes of Augustine and Luther.

Excursus: Heaven's Truth in the People's Context

It is not surprising that the creation narrative speaks within the cosmology of the day. It would surprise us if Genesis introduced twenty-first-century (or twenty-second, twenty-third, twenty-fourth century or later?) cosmological insights. Throughout the Bible, God's Spirit has spoken through prophets using the cultural constructs of their day.[35]

Jesus did something comparable in the parable of Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). He told about a poor man named Lazarus who died and entered the afterlife. A rich man who had neglected Lazarus also died and entered the afterlife. If he had wanted to, Jesus could have used that setting to give us a scientifically precise description of heaven and hell. But that was not his purpose. So Jesus employed the popular perceptions of the day for the scenery of Lazarus and the rich man after they died. He described Lazarus "carried by the angels to Abraham's side" (Lk 16:22). The popular period notion of being gathered to Abraham's bosom is akin to the modern notion of appearing before Saint Peter at the gates of heaven. Neither is exegetically defensible, though both are popular conceptions within their settings. Furthermore, the parable sets the place of Abraham's comfort and the place of torment as located in two side-by-side regions, separated by "a great chasm" (Lk 16:26). It was a popular notion in late Second Temple Judaism that the dead entered two sides of the same temporary location until the final judgment. There, the righteous were comforted by Abraham before being granted access into the presence of the Lord. The fact that Jesus employed the popular imagery of the day for his parable does not mean that he condoned it as accurate. Alfred Plummer explains, "*It is no purpose of the parable to give information about the unseen world. . . .* The details of the picture are taken from Jewish beliefs as to the condition of souls in Sheol."[36] The creation week is like Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man in this regard: both employ the perceptions of the period for the setting of the story in order to keep the message itself as our focus.

Likewise, Paul employed popular conventions (without correcting them) when he wrote, "Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth" (2 Tim 3:8). Jannes and Jambres were the names that had been popularly ascribed to the magicians in pharaoh's court who endeavored to match the signs performed by Moses (Ex 7:10-12). There is no record of the magicians' names in the book of Exodus. Furthermore, neither Jannes nor Jambres are Egyptian names. They are Greek names or Greek spellings of Semitic names, but they are not Egyptian names. Nevertheless, they are the names that were commonly attached to the Egyptian magicians in various Jewish writings

beginning in the first century before Christ.[37] The Holy Spirit did not correct popular perception on such details but rather guided Paul to write within the cultural conventions of his day. Compare also Paul's quotation from a poem about Zeus (Acts 17:28) and Jude's quote from the pseudepigraphal book of Enoch (Jude 14), which further illustrate the ability to use cultural conventions without "correcting" them. Throughout the Scriptures, God's prophets and apostles spoke heaven's truths within the cultural conventions of their original audiences. This includes the cosmology of the ancient world, which we find reflected in the creation week narrative, particularly evident in the creation of the dome on day two.

Day Three: Land and Sea

> *And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.*
>
> GENESIS 1:9-10

Day three introduces the final frontier to prepare the world for fruitfulness: the separation of the arable land from the sea waters. This is accomplished by gathering the waters "into one place" (*māqôm ʾeḥād;* v. 9). Within Israel's worldview, the "one place" might be an allusion to the Mediterranean Sea. The land of Israel was located next to the Mediterranean Sea, with the rest of the known world branching out north (Syria), east (Babylon), and south (Egypt and Arabia) of Israel. The only massive body of water known to Israel was the Mediterranean, which is called "*the* Great Sea" throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Num 34:6-7; Josh 1:4; 9:1; 15:12, 47; 23:4; Ezek 47:10, 15, 19-20; 48:28).[38] Israel knew other inland seas as well, like the Salt Sea (today called the Dead Sea; Gen 14:3), the Sea of Chinnereth (known in New Testament times as the Sea of Galilee; Num 34:11), and the Red Sea (Ex 10:19). But day three's reference to "one place" suggests it is the Mediterranean that is being envisioned over against the land of Canaan where Israel settled and farmed.[39]

The worldview of the text is tailored to its original audience, even though a modern understanding of the world recognizes many more "places" where water gathers. It was unnecessary for the Lord to teach Moses about the seven oceans and two polar ice caps represented on our modern globes. Had he done so, such advanced insight into geography might have prompted ancient explorers to search for "the seven foretold seas." But the text was not composed to give the world an exploration agenda. The passage is content to speak within the geographic understanding of the day, including the "one" (*ʾeḥād*) great sea that they knew.[40]

John Sailhamer suspects that the draining of the water away from the land is an allusion to a later flood, when the waters will overflow the land. Particularly in Noah's flood (Gen 6–9), the waters "undo" the creation and demonstrate God's judgment on the world.[41] The psalmist seems to reflect on the separation of the waters on day three with an awareness that their border is secure only because of God's mercy:

> You covered [the earth] with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. At your rebuke they fled; . . . The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to the place that you appointed for them. You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth. (Ps 104:6-9)

With the waters put in their place, the last pair of domain names are assigned: *earth* and *seas* (Gen 1:10). The emphasis is on the "dry land" (*hayyabbāšâ*) that is now freed to be fruitful.[42]

First Panel Climax (Day Three): Fruitfulness

> *And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.*
>
> GENESIS 1:11-13

The text points our attention to the earth, which has now been prepared to be fruitful. With everything well ordered, “Let the earth sprout!” So long as day and night, the rain-stocked heavens above, and the sea restrained behind its boundaries continue, the audience can expect the earth to continue to produce an abundance. As noted earlier, the verbs in verses 11-13 are all normal expressions of plant growth.[43] This is the same fruitfulness that later farmers witness in the land year by year. The text is not trying to amaze us with an unusual, one-time miracle but rather is showing us the marvel of a fruitful earth as God designed it for human participation. The text teaches Israel to regard the wonder of their own experience with agriculture as something that comes from the good order God provided to the land. As later Israelites nurture the same bounty, they are participating in the heritage and likeness of the Model Farmer, God himself.

In the first phrase in verse 11, all manner of vegetation sprouts (*dāšāʾ*). Two more phrases follow that divide the plants into categories: non-woody foliage, like grain and vegetables that grow up to yield seed (*mazrîaʿ zeraʿ*), and woody trees producing fruit that has its seed inside its fruit (*ʿōśeh-pərî*). Field and garden crops are listed to one side and orchards to the other. The world is no longer “without form” (*tōhû*), and therefore it is also no longer “empty” (*bōhû*), except for the lack of “cultivators” and “eaters” to manage and enjoy this fruitful world. Days four through six will make those introductions.

Conclusion

By ordering the world into five jurisdictions—day and night (day 1), heaven (day 2), land and sea (day 3)—God transforms the world into a fertile realm. The potency of the ordered world is demonstrated in the climax of the first half-week. In a second, “bonus” speech from God at the close of the third day, the now-ordered world brings forth all manner of field and orchard crops. The agricultural concern of the text provides a paradigm for the God-fearing farmer who similarly devotes his workweek to fostering the potential of his land in cooperation with the good order God built into it (cf. Ps 104:1-35).

It is evident that these descriptions make no attempt to lift the original audience into the scientific awareness of much later times. On day two, for example, Genesis describes the separation of the primeval waters into waters below and waters above by the insertion of a solid dome (*rāqîaʿ*). Efforts to find scientific "accuracy" in such features result in distortions to the text's reading. Instead of science, it is everyday farming that fills the imagery of the text. God presents himself as the first Farmer of the soil, whose goodness enables later farmers to continue in that heritage. The notion of God as farmer is repeated later in Genesis, when God is said to have "planted [*nāṭaʿ*] a garden" and caused it to "sprout [*ṣāmaḥ*]" (Gen 2:8-9, a.t.). The crops and orchards of God, here in Genesis 1:11-13 as well as in Eden, grew from sprouts. The world is now ordered for fruitfulness.



POPULATED FOR BLESSING (DAYS 4–6)

THE GOD OF CREATION IS A BEING of wisdom, goodness, and beauty. But he is supremely a God of love. Having ordered the world with a capacity for fruitfulness, God next fills it with creatures whom he blessed to enjoy those fruits.

In some creation myths of the ancient world, the gods are said to have made humankind to farm the ground to feed the gods. In the Babylonian *Epic of Atrahasis*, lesser gods were initially assigned the work of canal digging and crop cultivation. But "the gods' load was too great, the work too hard, the trouble too much," so they petitioned the most high god for relief. Humanity was created to do the work instead. "I have relieved you of your hard work," the high god told the other deities, "I have imposed your load on man."[1] These other nations thought their deities were hungry, and humans existed to grow crops and to herd cattle to provide sacrifices for divine consumption.[2]

The Genesis creation story paints a very different picture. In Genesis, we meet a God who fills his fruitful world with creatures and blessed them with the enjoyment of its fruits. Days four through six complete the "three-and-three" formula for the six-day workweek with this population of the world. Such a model of love taught in these paragraphs enriches the divine likeness that humankind is to reflect in our week-by-week labors and worship.

Day Four: Sun and Moon

> *And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.*
>
> GENESIS 1:14-19

The introduction of the sun and moon on day four, after the earth had already gone through several "evenings and mornings," is one of the long-standing puzzles of the creation narrative. Augustine concluded from this that God created everything in a single instant in verse 1 ("In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth") and then retold that one creation day six times in a topical, non-chronological order. "We should not think of those days [of the creation week] as solar days," he writes. "He made all things together [i.e., at one instant], disposing them in an order based not on intervals of time but on causal connections; and thus the creatures which were made all at once could be shown in their perfection by the sixfold repetition of the 'day' of creation."[3] (Augustine further wrestles with the fact that the moon shines only at night as a full moon on the fourteenth of the month, and the text dates its formation to rule the night on the fourth day, which Augustine believes to be the fourth of the month.)[4]

Origen wrestled with the same puzzle and concluded that the whole sequence is figurative:

> For who that has understanding will suppose that the first, second, and third day, and the evening and the morning, existed without a sun, and moon, and stars? and that the first day was, as it were, also without a sky? . . . I do not suppose that any one doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance, and not "literally."[5]

Sometimes, interpreters point to the "pillar of fire" by which God gave light to Israel leaving Egypt (Ex 13:21-22) or Revelation 21:23 to suggest that God himself was the world's source of light for the first three days: "And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its

lamp is the Lamb."[6] Others argue that the lights were already in existence and shining from the first day, but they were only assigned their duty on day four.[7]

In my view, the underlying assumption behind such explanations is mistaken. Each of these explanations (apart from Origen) presupposes that the creation narrative preserves actual occurrence chronology in some manner. But we have seen that the Pentateuch transparently realigns event timing when it puts those memories into a festival observance calendar. The fact that the author of Genesis does not show any concern to explain such "chronological anomalies" created by introducing day and night (Gen 1:3-5), evenings and mornings (vv. 5, 8, 13), and the blossoming of all manner of vegetation (vv. 11-12) before the "making [*ʿāśâ*]" of sun and moon (v. 16) should indicate that original event chronology is not the reason for this narrative's dates.

The first panel of three days describes the fruitfulness God placed into the world. The second panel will introduce the creatures who enjoy those fruits. But the appointment of daily and seasonal cadences for the harvests that enable the expected feasting is appointed at the head of the "feasters" panel. "Timekeepers" that mark the harvest time are installed on day four, with territorial residents to follow on days five and six.

It is the timekeeping role of the heavenly lights that is preeminent in this passage.[8] Three times the sun and moon are said to "rule [*memšālâ/māšal*]" over the day and the night (Gen 1:16, 18). This is the only place in the Bible where these words of authority are given to inanimate objects.[9] Every other appearance of the word is in connection with humans who bear authority. However, the term is broader in its application than terms of, specifically, kingship or supreme rule. This designation can refer to the managerial authority borne by a servant (e.g., Gen 24:2; 45:8, 26). Other nations of the ancient world regarded the sun and moon as being deities worthy of worship. The Genesis narrative carefully affirms the time-regulating authority of the heavenly lights without deifying them.[10]

Day Five: Birds and Fish

> *And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.*
>
> *GENESIS 1:20-23*

Day five introduces the first living creatures into the now-fruitful and time-regulated world. The creation of birds and sea creatures on day five corresponds to the separation of the waters by the insertion of the heavens on day two. The first blessing of the creation narrative is also pronounced on this date. God's goodness has been evident all through the week, but it is this pronouncement of blessing that brings his love to the fore.

There are two Hebrew words commonly translated "bless" in English. One word is *ʾāšēr*, which means "happy" (e.g., Ps 1:1). The other Old Testament word for bless is the one used here in Genesis 1:22. It is the term *bārak*, which is used when a person of rank bestows privileges on another (Heb 7:7). God blesses (*bārak*) the birds and the sea creatures. The full force of this insight has evaded many interpreters of the text, but it warrants attention. Kent Harold Richards, speaking about the meaning of the word *bārak*, writes, "Bless/blessing has been most frequently understood in terms of benefits conveyed. . . . This focus on the content of the benefit is now being viewed as secondary. The primary factor of blessing is the statement of relationship between parties. God blesses with a benefit on the basis of the relationship."[11]

In popular Christian conversation, we tend to talk about "blessings" and "being blessed" as conversation about good things that happen. Richards points out the mistaken emphasis of that common view. Recent lexicography has shown that the good things that come from being blessed are secondary to the word's actual meaning. The primary meaning of the word is the establishment of a relationship between a benefactor and a dependent. An individual does not bless (*bārak*) a stranger but rather a person with whom he is in, or establishing, a

relationship. When a ruler pronounces blessing on another, it is inherently an act of love, indicating a relationship of ongoing care and support. When, for instance, Jacob blessed (*bārak*) Ephraim and Manasseh, he was adopting them as his own sons. As a consequence of that adoption, Ephraim and Manasseh gained all the inheritance rights (the blessings) that flowed from that relationship (Gen 48:13-20). There is typically privilege, power, and provision that comes with a blessing. But a blessing is fundamentally an expression of relationship.

On day five, God reveals his blessing (his patronage) for the first living creatures, the birds and the sea animals. He grants them an inheritance in their respective realms and the authority to reproduce and fill (*mālēʾ*, to settle and possess) them. There is nothing stated in this paragraph about the processes by which God created the birds and the sea creatures. Genesis 1:21 simply says, "So God created [*bārāʾ*] the great sea creatures . . . and every winged bird according to its kind." Some imagine that the first generation of birds and fish were formed fully matured in an instant.[12] That is possible, but it is not what the verse says. The verse does not tell us anything about how God created these animals or how quickly he did so—only that he did so, and blessed them.

Day Six, Part 1: Land Animals

> *And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.*
>
> GENESIS 1:24-25

Day six appoints residents for the dry land, beginning with the animals of the ground. Three categories of "living creatures" (*nepeš ḥayyâ*) are indicated: livestock (*bəhēmâ*), creeping things (*remeś*), and beasts of the earth (*ḥaytô-ʾereṣ*). The first category is domestic livestock (*bəhēmâ*), thus headlining the calendar's interest in human labor. On its own, the word *bəhēmâ* can refer to all manner of four-footed creatures. However, when used in distinction from other beasts of the earth (as it is here), it typically distinguishes domestic livestock like cattle and sheep.[13] The second category is the "creeping things" (*remeś*). These are the small, four-legged rodents and lizards that tend to live in the wilderness regions as well as invading human settlements. The final category refers to the wild animals ("beasts of the earth"; *ḥaytô-ʾereṣ*) that properly roam in territories outside of human settlement. The classification of animal life into these categories—those belonging in domestic settings ("livestock," *bəhēmâ*), those crossing between both domestic and wilderness settings ("creeping things," *remeś*), and those belonging in the wilderness ("beasts of the earth," *ḥaytô-ʾereṣ*)—shows the sensitivity of this calendar to the proper order of realms that needs to be maintained for the flourishing of human society and the world.[14]

These categories of animals also show the calendar's design for a developed society that is domesticating and farming livestock. Traditionally, readers of the text have supposed that the creation week requires a vegetarian diet of humans and all the animals. The closing blessing of day six focuses on the world's fruits in parallel with the fruitfulness of the land at the end of day three. But this does

not mean animals or humans were created vegetarian. In particular, the division of the animals into categories that headlines "livestock" (*bəhēmâ*) indicates otherwise. This has little bearing on the debate over animal death before the fall,[15] since the narrative has been shaped to guide later farming (and meat-eating) Israel. The classification of animals on day six presupposes an audience of meat-eating farmers. In fact, the book of Leviticus (11:1-47) will introduce dietary ideals for Israel based around the same taxonomy presented in Genesis 1:20-25, thus indicating the likely intention of this calendar to address the categories of animal management operative in Mosaic-era Israel.[16] Earlier, we saw how the plants on day four were classified into categories corresponding to human field and orchard labors (vv. 11-12). These animal classifications further fit the taxonomy of a farming audience.

One phrase repeated several times in Genesis 1 finds special emphasis in this passage. The phrase *according to their kind* (*ləmînāh*) is repeated in connection with the reproduction of plants (Gen 1:11-12), sea creatures (v. 21a), birds (v. 21b), and land animals (vv. 24-25). But this phrase receives special emphasis with the creation of the land animals, as seen in the display below:

And God said,	
"Let the earth bring forth living creatures	*according to their kinds—*
• livestock and	
• creeping things and	
• beasts of the earth	*according to their kinds."*
And it was so.	
• And God made the beasts of the earth	*according to their kinds,*
• and the livestock	*according to their kinds,*
• and everything that creeps on the ground	*according to its kind.*

And God saw that it was good.

On the first list, the phrase *according to their kinds* frames the list (it appears at the beginning and with the last item on the list). The second time, the phrase is repeated with each item on the list (all three times). This repetition is part of a rhetorical technique that is best appreciated when hearing the passage read aloud. By getting that rhythm "according to their kinds" fixed in our hearing through its repetition in the first half of day six, the sudden change to something different with the last category of creation on day six stands out more vividly. The creation of humankind exchanges the formula "according to their kinds" for the profound announcement, "in the image of God" (v. 27). Humanity is the only item on the entire creation list that has a prototype: God himself.

Day Six, Part 2: Humankind

> *Then God 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 livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*
>
> GENESIS 1:26-28

The high point of the six days is the creation of humankind, made "in the image of God" (Gen 1:26-27). That this is a point of climax is indicated by the number of divine utterances on this day (four rather than the typical one or two per day); by the order of God's contemplation (on other days he creates and then assigns roles; on this day he expresses his reasons before creating);[17] and even in the way the day is numbered, since the previous days were counted "a second day" and "a third day," but this is called "*the* sixth day (*yôm haššiššî*)" (v. 31). The most prominent marker of the day's uniqueness, however, is its presentation of a creedal statement: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27).

This statement's poetic form makes it the rhetorical high point of the text. It is the crowning word, quite literally since it has royal overtones. It was typically the kings in ancient lands who received the designation "son" and "image bearer" of the nation's deity.[18] The title "image of god (or, God)" is not about a ruler's physical likeness to the deity. This title identifies the king's duty to reveal heaven's righteousness to his land—to embody the character, justice, and purposes of heaven to bring the land he rules into harmony with heaven's order. Many nations of the ancient world used the language of divine sonship or divine image-bearing to express this royal duty. In fact, the title is typically assigned to kings. This statement in Genesis 1:27 declares the true Creator's calling for all

people to be image-bearing "kings" through their collaboration as societies to steward his world.[19]

The statement begins with one image bearer: "God created the man [*hāʾādām*] in his own image, in the image of God he created him [*ʾōtô*]" (Gen 1:27, a.t.).[20] In the final line, the one man is joined by a woman, thereby pointing ahead to families and societies: "male and female he created them [*ʾōtām*]" (Gen 1:27). The phrase *male and female* anticipates not only marriage but family and community more broadly. There are other, more typical Hebrew words used to speak of a man (*ʾîš*) and a woman (*ʾiššâ*). The terms *male* (*zākār*) and *female* (*nəqēbâ*) used here refer to the sexual distinction of the genders and their reproductive design. This word choice indicates the expectation of an entire race, not merely of human beings but of human societies (i.e., reproducing families organizing royally "in God's image").

Divine image bearing is not something humans fulfill in isolation from one another. Divine image bearing is something humans embody in our relationships with God, with one another, and in stewardship of the world as societies.[21] In fact, the author does something daring in this text: he uses *plural* pronouns to refer to the *one* God. "Then God said, 'Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness'" (Gen 1:26). Some have perceived God's triune nature in those pronouns, revealing his own social nature (i.e., his love) as being the divine nature he created humans to reflect.[22] Others believe God uses the plural pronoun to indicate the presence of angels as "assistants" in the creation of humanity.[23] In either case, God acts as a social being to make humanity in his likeness ("Let *us* make man"). The Creator identifies his own social nature—his love, justice, holiness, goodness, and faithfulness—as central to the divine likeness humanity is to reflect. Humanity is created for society, to reflect God's likeness in the world as individuals, families, and communities.

"Then God said, . . . 'Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'" (Gen 1:26). The call to dominion is repeated a second time, later in the text: "And God blessed them [humankind]. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth

and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (Gen 1:28). Like the other living creatures, humanity is granted a single domain in which to reproduce and settle: "fill the earth and subdue it." However, unlike any other creature, humanity is also granted dominion over all the other living creatures in their respective realms: "and have dominion [*rādâ*] over the fish *of the sea* and over the birds *of the heavens* and over every living thing that moves *on the earth*." This dominion is what makes the role of humankind in the world so much greater than that of any other creature.

There is also a difference between the human relationship to his realm and that of the other creatures to their realms. Other creatures are said to "fill" (*mālēʾ*) their domains (Gen 1:20, 22). That "filling" connotes reproduction as well as possession, settlement, and enjoyment of that realm and its fruits. Humankind also exercises this "filling" privilege, but there is an added call to "subdue" (*kābaš*) that is assigned only to humankind. The subjugation that Genesis 1:28 has in mind is that borne in God's image: the wise, good, and nurturing rule just illustrated by God who subdued the disorderly, barren world of Genesis 1:2 and made it a fruitful and good place for the blessing and benefit of all the living creatures. God himself took the dark and desolate world and brought out its beauty and goodness. He did not abuse it, rob it, or neglect it.[24] To avoid the misconceptions with which the English word *subdue* is fraught, perhaps we should paraphrase this command as "*nurture* the earth" or, indeed, "farm the earth" as God did.[25] It is easy to overread the grand language of "subduing the earth" and to forget that we are studying a workweek calendar, not a philosophical or scientific treatise on the human species. The subduing of the earth here in view is essentially the work of tending the soil and fostering all other world- and culture-building vocations. The other animals enjoy the fruits of their realms, but they do not farm and uphold the order of the world (cf. Mt 6:26, 28). The command to subdue the earth is a calling to bring forth the God-given fruitfulness of the ground.

One facet of this dominion over the world involves keeping each of the other creatures in its proper realm. The Hebrew farmer is going to build walls to keep

the foxes and lions out of his grapevines and sheep pens (1 Sam 17:34-35; 2 Chron 32:28; Song 2:15; Mk 12:1). He will send his children out to wave the birds away from the freshly sown fields (Gen 15:11). He will dig wells and cisterns to collect rain water (2 Kgs 18:31; Prov 5:15) and carve irrigation channels as needed to bring river water where he wants it for the feeding of his fields (Ex 7:19) and orchards (Ps 1:3) while mounding dikes where needed to keep the winter streams from flooding into his house or his crops (cf. Lk 6:48). He will also hunt and fish for the feeding of his household (Lev 17:13; Jer 16:16). In such practical ways, this calendar affirms the work to be done each week to subdue (that is, to farm) one's own land and to exercise dominion over other creatures and other realms to keep everything in balance and in its proper boundaries for the fruitfulness God ordained.

Too many readings of Genesis 1 miss the profound yet practical guidance that the text is intended to provide for daily work in a godly society under heaven. Too many readers of this passage assume it is composed to give us a description of the scientific processes and chronology of natural origins. It is my desire to commend a different interpretation of this beautiful opening chapter of the Bible. It is a calendar for guiding human stewardship of the creation, and its cadence is that of the human workweek. In fact, human stewardship of the world in God's likeness is the stated purpose of the creation week.

Second Panel Climax (Day Six): Fruitfulness Enjoyed

> *And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on 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 heavens 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.*
>
> GENESIS 1:29-30

The culmination of the six-day workweek is the enjoyment of produce. At the end of the first three-day panel (Gen 1:11-13), the fruitfulness of the earth was

established. The first half of the creation week led to a mouthwatering description the world's fruitfulness when well ordered. Now, in a parallel passage at the end of day six, after three days of placing rulers and residents in each of the world's realms, the enjoyment of that fruitfulness is granted. These parallel passages capping off each of the two halves of the workweek demonstrate that the purpose of this calendar is for guidance in human labor, epitomized by agricultural fruitfulness.

Genesis 1:29-30 is not a scientific report on the diet for which human, aviary, and bestiary digestive systems were designed. It has sometimes been supposed that these verses describe a strictly vegetarian diet for the earliest humans and wildlife of the world. However, if the purpose of these verses was *to restrict* all diets to vegetation, one would expect to find restrictive language (such as, "shall *only* eat plants" or "I give plants *and not meat*"). But there is no restrictive language present. Furthermore, if the intention of this passage was to restrict diets, the emphasis on *seed-bearing* foliage for humans and *green* foliage for animals is peculiar: "I have given you [humans] every plant *yielding seed* . . . and every tree *with seed* in its fruit. . . . And to every beast of the earth . . . I have given every *green* plant for food" (Gen 1:29-30). This would rule out any human consumption of mushrooms, bananas, or other plants propagating by bulbs, spores, shoots, and other seedless reproduction. And it would restrict animals to the consumption of green plants, ruling out many of the more colorful plants of the world. As Derek Kidner states,

> The assigning of *every green plant for food* (RSV) to all creatures must not be pressed to mean that all were once herbivorous, any more than to mean that all plants were equally edible to all. It is a generalization, that directly or indirectly, all life depends on vegetation, and the concern of the verse is to show that all are fed from God's hand.[26]

Instead, the point of this distinction is that humans plant seeds from what they eat to grow more food, while animals eat without regard for seed planting. And none of these descriptions are limiting.

Whether the earliest humans were vegetarian is not a question answered by this text. It is an argument from silence to deduce that a strictly vegetarian diet is required by those verses. As John Calvin wrote, "Some infer, from this passages

that men were content with herbs and fruits until the deluge, and that it was even unlawful for them to eat flesh. . . . These reasons, however are not sufficiently strong. . . . I think it will be better for us to assert nothing concerning this matter."[27]

My reason for drawing out these observations is simply to show that the purpose of the text is to guide later Israel in their farming the land, not to give a scientific description of the world prior to Adam's fall. This paragraph on eating crops is mirroring the agrarian wealth of the world as ordered by day three. The purpose of this passage is blessing, not dietary limitation. It captures the transformation of the previously barren and unproductive world (*tōhû wābōhû*, Gen 1:2) into one that will now sustain human and animal life. The focus on foliage is because it is the *land's* fruitfulness that enables humans and animals to thrive all the way up the rest of the food chain.

A "Very Good" World

> *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*
>
> GENESIS 1:31

The final verse of day six reports the Lord's special pleasure in the condition of the entire creation with humankind as its steward. As a result of his creative work, the world that was once "without form and void" (*tōhû wābōhû;* Gen 1:2) is now "very good" (*ṭôb məʾōd;* Gen 1:31). The import of this pronouncement should be carefully considered.

The reason the world was "very good" is not because it was complete, having achieved its ideal state of beauty and maturity. The world was still lacking. The small population of animals and humans and the lack of crops and communities in the world had yet to be resolved. It was the Lord's purpose that the plants and animals and humans he created would reproduce, develop, and fill (Gen 1:11, 22, 28) the earth. But that had not yet happened. In fact, the very next narrative in Genesis begins with the world's lack of "bush[es] of the field . . .

[and] plant[s] of the field," indicating the need for human labor to cultivate it (Gen 2:5-6). The Garden of Eden that God planted as Adam's starting place (Gen 2:8-9) was not a picture of the condition of the whole world. There was one model garden located in a specific place (Gen 2:10-15). Adam was moved from the uncultivated regions, placed inside that garden, and tasked with cultivating the surrounding lands (Gen 2:15). The author of Genesis does not want us to read God's designation "very good" as implying that the world is finished. There is still much to be done.

The world was very good because God had put everything into place to bring about its perfection. "In general usage 'good' [*ṭôb*] indicates a state or function appropriate to genre, purpose, or situation. Thus the fruit of the trees in Eden is described as 'good for food' (Gen 2:9; cf. 3:6)."[28] On each of the creation days God made a similar assessment of the work of each day: it is "good [*ṭôb*]" (Gen 1:4, 10, 18, 21, 25). In each of these instances, the designation *ṭôb* ("good") "draws attention to an object's quality and fitness for its purpose."[29] It was not the present attractiveness of the thing approved but its potential to achieve the intended end that this commendation expressed. This might explain why one of the six days lacks the designation "it is good."

The second day alone lacks any review by the Creator at the end of the day. On day two, God made the firmament that separated the waters above from the waters below. Notably, this was the one element of the creation week that was, indeed, fixed without any expectation of change. Every other creation day featured items directly tied to the human experience of farming and development: light (day 1), earth emerging from the sea (day 3), the heavenly lights to govern human calendars (day 4), creatures of the water and the air (day 5), and the land animals (day 6). Only the dome of the heavens (day 2) is fixed, lacking expectation of growth and (within the view of the text) beyond human interaction. The absence of the designation "good" for day two may indicate the significance of the term as pointing to the potential of the thing so praised rather than its present condition.

The final designation "very good" was ascribed to the entire creation order with humankind at its head. This expresses God's utter delight at the glorious

ends that everything was now in place to bring about. The enthusiasm of the Creator is evident in the passage: "Instead of the usual word for 'that,' כי, used before (e.g., v 4), here והנה 'that . . . really' is used, suggesting God's enthusiasm as he contemplated his handiwork."[30] Like a spouse rejoicing on a wedding day, full of joy in one's spouse now present and with visions for the future, the delight of the Creator is in the telos for which he transformed the world from *tōhû wābōhû* to its condition of order, beauty, and potential for community and fruitfulness.

God gave a creation mandate (Gen 1:28) to humans that would bring about the world's divinely appointed glory. Even if Adam had never sinned, there still would have been work to do to bring about the full beauty of the world. Sin did not undo the world's completion; it added a further set of obstacles to the completion of the creation mandate (Gen 3:14-19). But in God's mercy, he has not abandoned his good end for the world or humanity's privileged role in it. The Christian hope is not for a "return to Eden" but rather for a completion of the Edenic vision of the glorious kingdom for which the original garden was but a seed (cf. Gen 2:4-25; Rev 21:1–22:5).

The creation week ends with the designation "very good," not so that we would look longingly back to the world's created state, but so we would labor according to the creation week model looking forward to the world's divinely inscribed potential. Like proud parents looking into the face of a newborn baby, watching a son or daughter graduate from school, or walking the aisle to start a family of his or her own, the joy pronounced in the words "it was very good" was the joy anticipating all the good yet to come now that everything had been properly ordered. This is a calendar designed to motivate us to observe this particular pattern of godly labor and weekly worship as being the pattern which will bring out that goodness.

Conclusion

There is real history behind the Genesis 1:1–2:3 creation week. But this is a pastoral text, not a scientific record. We are not drawn into the sophistic details

of natural processes but are rather shown the character of the God whose image we are to reflect in our weekly patterns of work and worship. There is a real God who is personal in his nature, wise in his purposes, and loving in his works. It is he who created the world to be good and fruitful. We do not need a scientific description of original creation processes in order for our faith to be certain. But we do need the guidance of this liturgical narrative to teach us how our weeks need to reflect God's likeness and nurture the world's goodness.

Those who come to this text looking for scientific origins will find many questions unanswered. There is no information about the origin of the angels or of demons in this chapter.[31] There is no information about the origins of bacteria, or the introduction of weather patterns, or even the presence of rivers in the world. There is no information about black holes or dark energy or galaxies. There is no hint concerning the vast size of the universe: the entire worldview of the Genesis creation account fits within the dome of the earth, with the heavenly lights suspended from that dome in the sky. There is no discussion about the fundamental laws of physics, the purpose of non-earthly entities like Mars or the Andromeda Galaxy and invisibly distant stars that neither govern earth's calendars nor give it light. This chapter addresses only a small set of questions about physical origins. Its real focus is on the cadence of human labor in keeping with the world's ordained fruitfulness.

The final three days of the workweek complete this picture of godly labor through the six days of the week. The climax of the entire workweek is the creation of humanity in the likeness of God, with regal dominion to lead the creation into the fulfillment of its created potential.



CROWNED WITH COMMUNION (DAY 7)

UNDER THE REIGN OF KING JEROBOAM II (ca. 786–746 BC), the northern kingdom of Israel enjoyed a golden age of prosperity. Jeroboam restored the nation's boundaries "from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah" (2 Kgs 14:25). He also reinvigorated the nation's economy, bringing an era of unprecedented wealth. As Abraham Heschel notes, "The rich had their summer and winter palaces adorned with costly ivory ([Amos] 3:18), gorgeous couches with damask pillows (3:12), on which they reclined at their sumptuous feasts. They planted pleasant vineyards, [and] anointed themselves with precious oils (6:4–6; 5:11)."[1] The nation was as strong as it had ever been. But during this period of prosperity, the people grew to despise the sabbath.

Rather than enjoying a weekly rest from their fruitful labors, the people yearned to make money all week long. The prophet Amos cried out,

> Hear this, you who . . . [say], "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale?" . . . "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD." (Amos 8:4-11)

The people's taste of wealth only fueled their lust for more, so that they grieved to put aside their business for the day of worship.

Amos's rebuke is as relevant today as it was 2,800 years ago. The sabbath principle has fallen on hard times, particularly in prosperous regions of the modern world. Perhaps we need to hear Amos again, pointing our hearts back to the cadence taught in the creation week. What would happen if the zeal and

financial investments currently poured into debating the creation week's implications for science was instead directed into promoting its implications for godly labor and worship? The purpose of the creation week narrative is not to preserve the original chronology of creation but to apply the Creator's priorities in the cadences of human stewardship of the creation.

> Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (Gen 2:1-3)

A Day of Rest

By the seventh day, "God finished his work that he had done" (Gen 2:2). Nothing new was made on the seventh day, but it was not a day without activity. There are two actions by God ascribed to the seventh day. "He rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done," and "[he] blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (Gen 2:2-3). We will first consider his rest on the seventh day and thereafter his blessing of the day.

The name *sabbath* (*šabbāt*) does not appear in this passage, but the seventh day gained that title because it was a day of *šābat*, which means "to cease," "to rest," or even "to sit down to rest."[2] God commanded his people to rest on the weekly sabbath (Ex 20:8-11) based on his own example as the original "sabbath keeper" at the end of his week creating the world. Was God tired after his workweek? C. John Collins highlights the language of weariness used in the elaboration on God's rest in Exodus: "Exodus 20:11 uses a more specific word to describe God's rest (הניח, *henîakh*), and Exodus 31:17 says that on the seventh day God 'rested' (שבת) and 'was refreshed' (הנפש, *hinnapesh*, as if to get his breath back)."[3] Is the Pentateuch teaching us that God was literally tuckered out? No. The prophet Isaiah offers this comment on the creation week: "The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary" (Is 40:28). Isaiah was not downplaying the creation week by denying that God actually sought refreshment; he was showing us how to read it correctly (cf. Jn 5:17). The language of rest on the seventh day is there

to give us a model for our reception of God's gifts. The calendar continues to present God as a Model Laborer for human imitation, not only in his six days of work but also in his seventh-day rest.

But the sabbath rest is more than catching one's breath. It is also a day to feast on the fruits of the work accomplished. The Model Worker had been laboring all week to make his domain fruitful. The plot line running through the week has been one of ordering, planting, and managing livestock in order to have food to provide on the sixth day. The narrative had moved from barrenness to fruit-production (days 1-3) and then to fruit-giving (days 4-6). Only then comes the seventh day, as a day when God "rested . . . from all his work that he had done" (Gen 2:2). The implication is one of resting amid the fruits of the week's labor just gathered for the sake of feasting. The fruitfulness of the seventh day is in light of, and provided for by, the previous six days.

Throughout the Scriptures, sabbaths are days of joy that include eating from the week's produce. In Exodus 16:22-26, Israel was taught to gather extra manna on the sixth day in order to have plenty to eat on the sabbath. The result is, admittedly, a smaller feast than provided at the major harvest festivals. Nevertheless, the weekly sabbaths are included among the designated "feast days" of Israel (Lev 23:2-3; Hos 2:11), and "food offerings" for the Lord to feast with the people were among the temple prescriptions for the sabbath (Num 28:9-10). The rest enjoyed on the seventh day involved the fruits of the six days just finished. God is said to have "rested on the seventh day *from all his work that he had done*" (Gen 2:2). He rested from it not only by setting it aside but also by bringing about the fruitfulness to "eat" and enable a day without work. God did not actually eat the food offerings presented on that day, but he ritually ate with his people in the feasting of that day. The sabbath rest was not merely a break from the work of the previous six days but an enjoyment of its fruits.

A Holy Day

The second action undertaken on the seventh day was God's pronouncement of blessing. The creatures had been blessed, each on the days they were created.

The blessing God announced on those occasions was specific. He blessed his creatures with fruitfulness and multiplication (Gen 1:22, 28) and with the authority to occupy ("fill," v. 22) and, in the case of humans, to manage ("have dominion" and "subdue," v. 28) their respective realms. God's blessings on the creatures had specific provisions. Likewise, the blessing on the seventh day has a stated purpose: he "blessed the seventh day and [thereby] made it holy" (Gen 2:3).

When something is made holy, it is removed from normal use and set apart for the use of God. Consider, for example, the cups and bowls set apart for use in the temple (e.g., Ex 25:29, 38; 27:3, 19). Many bowls and pitchers were used in the homes of Israel. But the holy vessels were never to be used for common meals. They were devoted for use in worship in the sacrifice meals and other rituals of God's house, not in common uses. The Babylonian king mocked Israel's God when he "commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that . . . had [been] taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them" (Dan 5:2).

The temple itself was set apart as holy space. Many activities were good and necessary for God's people to undertake in their homes and fields but were never to be done inside the holy space set apart for worship. For example, when Jesus entered the temple in Jerusalem, "[he] began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple" (Mk 11:15). The problem was not that money was being exchanged and sacrifice animals sold. In fact, the Mosaic law specifically authorized pilgrims traveling long distances to bring money to the temple and to buy their sacrifice animals when they arrived at Jerusalem (Deut 14:24-26). There was nothing sinful about buying and selling sacrifice animals. But those transactions were to take place in the city, not inside the temple itself. Jesus rebuked the temple rulers of his day, saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'?" (Mk 11:17). The temple was holy space, set apart for the purposes of worship.

In the same manner, the seventh day was set apart for Israel as holy time. The fourth commandment expounds on the seventh day of the creation narrative in these words: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . The seventh

day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, . . . [for] the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Ex 20:8-11). For Israel to keep the day holy involved both negative and positive commands: they were not to do their normal work on the seventh day, and they were to hold "a Sabbath [that is, a worship festival] to the LORD your God." Jesus cleared the money changers from the temple to restore the temple's positive function as a house for prayer. Likewise, Israel was instructed to keep "all your work" (Ex 20:8) in the six-day workweek in order to preserve the holiness of the sabbath for rest and worship.[4]

The Completion of Order

Rest and blessing are the two activities of God on the seventh day, but a third emphasis of the day is the finished condition of the world. The work of the people will be finished only on a week-by-week basis, but the creative work of God remembered on that holy day is completely finished. Terms of finality are repeated throughout the seventh-day report. The word *finished* (*kālâ*) is repeated twice, and its cognate *all* (*kōl*) is repeated three times further. Additionally, the merism "the heavens and the earth" indicates that the whole scope of God's domain is now in order. With repetition and grand scale, the passage presses home the point that God's work of creation was not merely well under way: his work of creation was now finished. What, specifically, had God completed in that creation week?

At the beginning of the creation week, "the earth was without form and void [*tōhû wābōhû*]" (Gen 1:2). At the end of the creation week, the world was still uncultivated: "no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up" (Gen 2:5). There was still work to be done in the world —indeed, an entire world history was yet to follow before the completion of God's kingdom. However, the barrenness (*tōhû*) and unfruitfulness (*bōhû*) of the world was completely resolved. The world had been given its material features and the proper order so that everything is now in place for its fruitfulness as a realm for human society in communion with God (Gen 1:27-28). The

completion of the seventh day is like that of a king who has conquered his domain and has ordered all things so his people may now settle, establishing families and farms and businesses, and flourish there.[5] Not everything is done, but everything is in order.

The seventh-day report brings out this emphasis on the completed *order* of the world in the final phrase of the passage: "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all his work *which God created by making* [*ʾăšer-bārāʾ ʾĕlōhîm laʿăśôt*]" (Gen 2:3, a.t.).[6] In other words, the goal of God's week was to "create" (*bārā)*, and he achieved that goal by "making" (*ʿăśôt*) things. In fact, that verb *bārāʾ* appears as the purpose statement in both the prologue (1:1) and the epilogue (2:3) of the creation narrative. These opening and closing frames identify the whole week as the story of "the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1; 2:1) being "created [*bārāʾ*]" (1:1; 2:3).[7] The term *bārāʾ* expresses the essence of the work God completed in that model week.

It used to be popular to treat *bārāʾ* as a special term for the creation of matter from nothing (creation *ex nihilo*).[8] The Bible does state elsewhere that God brought matter into being from nothing (Jn 1:3; Heb 11:3), but that is not the meaning of *bārāʾ*. The significance of this term is not a certain method of creation (i.e., creation *ex nihilo*) but rather a certain outcome. *Bārāʾ* is used to indicate the introduction of a new form, a new order, or a new system.[9] For example, this verb is used to describe the formation of Abraham (a Chaldean) and his heirs into a new nation, the fountainhead of Israel. Isaiah writes, "But now thus says the LORD, he who created [*bārāʾ*] you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: . . . 'I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator [*bārāʾ*] of Israel, your King'" (Is 43:1, 15). The term indicates the "creation" of a new order, as forming a new nation by drawing a family out of another nation.

Thomas Finley has catalogued numerous instances in which *bārāʾ* has a "sociological construction," indicating God's creation of a community. Finley has shown that the verb can also be used with an "ethical construction," in which a new moral order is in view—for instance, Psalm 51:10, "Create [*bārāʾ*] in me a clean heart, O God" (Heb., v. 12), and Isaiah 45:8, "Let the clouds rain down

righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit; . . . I the LORD have created [*bārāʾ*] it."[10] When the Hebrew verb *bārāʾ* is used, its purpose is to emphasize the creation of a *new order*.[11] Note how the term is used within the creation week itself.

The most common verbs of construction in the creation narrative include "Let there be / it was [*yəhî*]" (13 times; Gen 1:3, 6-7, 9, 11, 14-15, 24, 30), "separate [*bādal*]" (5 times; Gen 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18), and "made [*ʿāśâ*]" (8 times; 1:7, 16, 25, 26, 31; 2:2, 3). There are only two instances in which *bārāʾ* is used (apart from the frames; 1:1; 2:4), both times in connection with things that God introduces into a unique order of existence.[12] First, the sea creatures and the birds are not merely "made [*ʿāśâ*]" but are "created [*bārāʾ*]" (Gen 1:21). They are creatures equipped for a different order of life than the norm (from a human perspective), being designed for life in the waters and in the air. Second, humankind is both "made [*ʿāśâ*]" (Gen 1:26) and "created [*bārāʾ*]" (Gen 1:27),[13] being formed after the likeness of God for an order of existence distinct from the rest of nature. The verb *bārāʾ* indicates a new order, not necessarily new stuff. In the creation week, the verb "made [*ʿāśâ*]" is the term preferred for the introduction of new things.. Once the nuance of the term *bārāʾ* is understood, its significance in the purpose statement of the creation narrative's frames becomes clear. The six days involved all manner of inventions by God, making and separating; but the overarching purpose of the whole process was to establish the world's fruitful order (*bārāʾ*) wherein his good purposes in history can unfold.

At the beginning of the narrative, the earth was both barren (*tōhû*) and unfruitful (*bōhû*). But through God's work to make the world fruitful and teeming with life, it was made "very good." The ultimate fulfillment of the world's potential is far from being completed. But everything was properly ordered and endowed to become the fruitful domain for God's people to flourish in communion with him. The seventh day commemorates the end of the ordering of the world.[14]

The Celebration of Hope

One of the most important implications of recognizing the purpose of the creation week activity as establishing a fruitful order for the world is the anticipatory character that such an understanding introduces into the sabbath day. The seventh day was not appointed simply to look back at what was finished. It was a day to remember the good order God had established and to anticipate the full fruits made possible by that order. Elsewhere in the Old Testament the sabbath day is described as a "sign" of God's promise to make his people into his holy kingdom (Ex 31:12-17; Neh 9:14). In the New Testament the sabbath is regarded as a symbol of hope in the world's good telos (Heb 4:1-13). Like the joy of a couple on their wedding day, the delight of the sabbath is to celebrate that everything is in place for the "dreamed of" outcome that is yet to happen. The work is not done, but everything is now prepared for the work to go forward in hope.

This lesson of expectation characterizes the next pericope in Genesis following the sabbath-crowned creation week. Once the world is properly stocked and ordered, Genesis 2:4-9 introduces the next section of the creation story with the need for, and expectation of, fruitfulness:[15]

> These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created [*bārāʾ*], in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.
>
> When no bush of the field [*śîaḥ haśśādeh*] was yet in the land and no small plant of the field [*ʿēśeb haśśādeh*] had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, [then] a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—[and] the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.
>
> And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

This scene introduces a wilderness that is full of potential for hosting a farming society but that presently lacks cultivated plant life. The Hebrew phrases "bush of the field" (*śîaḥ haśśādeh*) and "plant of the field" (*ʿēśeb haśśādeh*) refer to pasturage for animals and field crops for humans, respectively.[16] To bring about such cultivation, the land needs two things: rain from God above and a workman to cultivate the soil below. God himself provides the water and also forms the

man. He even plants a “starter garden” from which the man will extend the work of cultivation and community into the whole world.

Within the Genesis narrative itself, the sabbath-day rest opens up into expectation. Now that the world’s “very good” order is finished, its development into a fruitful community of humans and agriculture and wildlife can be anticipated. In addition to being retrospective, the sabbath also celebrates the confident hope that undergirds human labor, knowing that the world is fully equipped to achieve God’s good ends.[17]

Conclusion

As in the days of Jeroboam, the sabbath has fallen into widespread disfavor today in the midst of Western prosperity. But the principle of the sabbath is making a comeback. Modern prosperity has also brought a culture of anxiety and exhaustion. Consequently, the notion of sabbath has become an attractive topic in recent books, articles, and blogs.

Walter Brueggemann describes this modern rediscovery of the sabbath as a form of “resistance.” Reflecting on Israel’s release from Egypt, Brueggemann writes,

> Wherever YHWH governs as an alternative to Pharaoh, there the restfulness of YHWH effectively counters the restless anxiety of Pharaoh. In our own contemporary context of the rat race of anxiety, the celebration of Sabbath is an act of both resistance and alternative. It is resistance . . . amid the barrage of seductive pressures . . . intru[ding] into every part of our life. . . . It is [also] an alternative to the demanding, chattering, pervasive presence of advertising and its great liturgical claim. . . . The alternative on offer [in the sabbath] is the awareness and practice of the claim that we are situated on the receiving end of the gifts of God.[18]

Brueggemann’s statement is interesting, not simply for its encouragement but also for what it illustrates. His statement shows the enduring power of historical narrative for guiding contemporary holiday observances. Brueggemann recalls Israel’s deliverance from Pharaoh’s oppression, but he is really talking about deliverance from “our own contemporary . . . rat race of anxiety” to renewed faith in “the gifts of God.” The application of historical memory to present

circumstances through “holidays” is a cornerstone of every society and no less for the people of God.

In the Pentateuch, harvest festivals were inscribed with the memories of the exodus and Noah’s deliverance by means of dated narratives. And the creative goodness of God was similarly inscribed into Israel’s sabbath week through the dated events of Genesis 1:1–2:3. The purpose of that creation week calendar was to inspire the common Hebrew fieldhand and shepherd with an awareness that the fruitfulness they worked for each week was put there by God. And the rest they celebrated each sabbath enabled them to cling to his promises to complete the kingdom in which they served.

In this chapter, we have come to the end of the creation week narrative. God has likened himself to a Hebrew laborer, weary but satisfied after six days of labor, sitting down to enjoy its bounty on the seventh. Even the most literalist readings of the creation week calendar admit the character of the seventh day as a model for human imitation rather than an actual depiction of God “catching his breath.” I agree but argue that the entire week has been cast as a pattern for human labor and worship and not as a record of God’s actual creation chronology. It is therefore incumbent on us in the church today to make less of efforts to mine the creation week narrative for scientific insights and to make more of its practical guidance for our own labors and worship as stewards of the earth God made, fostering its fruitfulness in God’s image.



A CALENDAR FOR SABBATH, NOT SCIENCE

IF THERE IS ONE POINT ABOUT the creation narrative on which Christians have universally agreed, it is this: the Genesis 1 creation story teaches a weekly cadence of labor punctuated with worship. This is what the fourth commandment shows (Ex 20:8-11). Under this point of overarching agreement, the church has countenanced a variety of views on the narrative's relevance to natural history. Unfortunately, that point of agreement seems to have been minimized today, and arguments over the text's implication for naturalistic questions have been raised to levels of intolerance. As an Old Testament scholar who is also a full-time pastor, I hope to contribute toward a reversal of that trend. The creation week narrative casts a profound vision for our day-by-day labors as cooperation with the Creator's good order and our week-by-week worship as renewal in his creation purposes. The creation week needs re-emphasis as a working Christian's document and de-emphasis as a scientific treatise.

The approach to Genesis 1:1–2:3 proposed in this volume is one that any Hebrew farmer, stone mason, homemaker, or child would have been able to understand. It is not a complicated interpretation that requires anachronistic insights into cosmology, nor does it presuppose a cross-cultural education in Mesopotamian mythology, nor would this view have required taking some words at face value (like *day* [*yôm*]) while treating other terms metaphorically (like the *firmament* [*rāqîaʿ*] or the verb *sprout* [*dāšāʾ*]). It is a straightforward and accessible reading grounded in the pattern of calendar narratives found throughout the Pentateuch and consistent with the fourth commandment.

As for questions about natural origins, this reading of Genesis leaves open such curiosities as the age of the universe, the original chronology of creation events, and the processes of creation. Genesis does not tell us whether the world originally came into existence over several billion years or within the space of a few days. Whether God's word of creation prompted an immediate appearance of animals or launched their gradual evolution is not resolved by this text. To quote John Calvin, "This is a certain principle, that nothing is here treated of but the visible form of the world [i.e., how things appeared to the lay Israelite]. He who would learn astronomy, and other recondite arts, let him go elsewhere. Here the Spirit of God would teach all men without exception."[1] The simplicity of the narrative is a mark of God's love, communicating accessibly to men and women of all eras about his call to live by the sabbath metronome.

Historical Views on Genesis 1

Despite the variety of interpretations countenanced in history, some today insist that only a journalistic, six-day, young earth reading of the creation week is permissible—and that it is a touchstone of biblical faithfulness whether one upholds such a reading. These polemicists typically assert that their view on creationism has been the dominant perspective of the church through history.[2] But this is not accurate. There is no single "historical view" of the creation week events. In fact, the only facet of Genesis 1:1–2:3 that can be asserted as "the historic position of the church" is its calendrical function.

Robert Letham writes, "Claims that a literal reading of the days of Genesis 1 is *obvious* fall down when the history of interpretation is taken into consideration. . . . [Many have held that] Genesis is of a different literary genre than a science text book."[3] For example, Origen (ca. 185–254) reported that in his day "[no one] doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance, and not literally."[4] Note that Origen is not presenting an obscure interpretation; he attests that a figurative interpretation was, in fact, the dominant view in his time.[5]

Letham's article surveys a variety of historic interpretations, such as those of Origen (ca. 185–254), Basil the Great (ca. 330–379), Ambrose (ca. 339–397), Augustine (354–430), Bede (ca. 673–735), Anselm (ca. 1033–1109), Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1168–1253), Aquinas (1225–1274), and Martin Luther (1483–1546). From this survey, Letham finds that "Luther is . . . the first of the major exegetes we have considered who without ambiguity adopts the interpretation that the days of creation are of twenty-four hour duration, at the same time arguing that the earth is only six thousand years old."[6] Even then, Luther's did not become the universal view of the church.

There have been, of course, notable efforts to interpret the creation text as a more or less journalistic description of the universe. But it is a stretch to find anything among the early church fathers approaching the six-day, young earth paradigm popularized in twentieth-century polemics.[7] Augustine, for example, held that the creation happened in an instant (citing Gen 1:1 and Ps 33:6-9) but was described around the pattern of a six-day week. The whole event happened on day one but was revealed "by six repetitions of the originally created day" in order to accommodate our instruction.[8]

Although Augustine regarded the narrative's timing as an accommodation, he did believe that the account gave a physically precise description of the world.[9] Yet he admitted difficulties trying to reconcile the physical worldview of the creation narrative with actual observations. He found it difficult to understand, for example, how an expanse of water was actually suspended above the sun, moon, and stars (Gen 1:7-8, 14-18). Augustine concluded, "Whatever the nature of that water [over the heavens] and whatever the manner of its being there, we must not doubt that it does exist in that place. The authority of Scripture in this matter is greater than all human ingenuity."[10]

In other words, early church fathers like Origen and Augustine agreed that reading the text "scientifically" posed difficulties. For Origen, those difficulties demonstrated that the text was not intended to be read that way. For Augustine, such difficulties called for trust in the text's description of the world with an admission of ignorance concerning our own understanding of it. While I am persuaded that Origen is correct on this point, the modesty of Augustine is

becoming for those who do endeavor to align Genesis with scientific observation. Too often we encounter interpreters who selectively enforce a literal interpretation of some terms in Genesis (like *day*) while denying a literal interpretation to others (like *waters above* the heavenly lights).[11] If one is going to insist on taking Genesis as a precise rather than historically situated depiction, it would be important to adopt Augustine's modesty and accept a literal reading of all the terms in the narrative. That would include faith in the presence of a physical firmament over the sun with a sea of waters above that, even if these things are no longer present or just undetected by modern science. That is what it would look like to take the Genesis creation account as a literal description of the actual order of the cosmos in all its expressions, which would be preferable to (and more Augustinian than) the "selective literalism" of modern young earth apologists. But, in fact, most so-called literal readings of Genesis 1 actually do not read the text literally enough, dismissing the dome and waters above the sun and so forth. An actual literal reading is hard to maintain today. It was reasonable to maintain such readings in the days of the Reformation and back into the early centuries of the church. But the scientific revolution beginning in the sixteenth century made the Augustinian view less tenable and other equally historic views (like that of Origin) more tenable. Modern astronomy, geology, biology, and the other sciences have not threatened "the historic" interpretation of the creation week. Modern science has helped the church to better sort out which historic interpretations are viable.

Francis Watson makes the helpful observation that the modern era has brought "the liberation of the biblical text from its captivity to the natural sciences."[12] Both scientific and nonscientific interpretations of Genesis were countenanced within the church prior to the nineteenth century, but the discoveries of modern science have made it increasingly difficult to harmonize the ancient worldview held in biblical times (and reflected in the historically situated descriptions in Scripture) and that of our own era. The result is a help to the church by demonstrating *which* historical approaches to Genesis are more plausible while freeing the text from those readings that have imposed inappropriate assumptions on them.

It is inaccurate to assert that a six-day, young earth view is *the* orthodox, historic position of the church. Many views on the text's relevance to naturalistic questions have been countenanced through history.[13] What has united the church however has been the text's usefulness as a guide for weekly labor and worship. That truly historic view is what we need to recover.

What About the Science of Origins?

The corollary to restoring the text's practical usefulness is the removal of its use for scientific controversy. The apostle Paul states, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training *in righteousness*" (2 Tim 3:16). The Bible is not given "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training *in science.*" If we want to find answers to scientific questions, we need to pursue those through the tools of science.

We should approach the science of origins the same way we approach the scientific study of cancer or electricity or chemistry. The creation mandate (Gen 1:28) urges us to study and explore the world, using the fallible but meaningful tools of human intelligence.[14] The current consensus from scientific study points to the operation of evolution over long eons of time. These conclusions are fallible, like all human investigation. Nevertheless, they are results that must be critiqued on their own merits and through further scientific research. It may yet be demonstrated that the world was created in a far shorter time and much more recently than allowed by the current consensus, but that needs to be shown through scientific study. The Bible should no more be used to determine the age of the universe than to determine the processes of trait inheritance through reference to Jacob's breeding methods in Genesis 30:37-43. The interpretation of the creation narrative that I have commended neither teaches evolution nor denies its possibility.

Distinguishing Evolution and Idolatry

That being said, it is important to distinguish between *evolution* (a natural process) and *evolutionary naturalism* (a philosophy).[15] Sinful humanity is prone

to turn almost any powerful idea into an idol that replaces God. Money is one of the oldest forms of social power that has often been turned into an idol. The abuse of money does not negate the importance of Christians engaging in economics, but it warns against making an idol of money (1 Tim 6:10). Knowledge is another source of power that has often been turned into an idol. As Christians, we ought to pursue education and to foster knowledge (Prov 1:4), but we must strive against its abuse as an idol that replaces God (1 Cor 8:1). The family, human government, the church, sexuality, military force, movies, music, business, art, technology, and many other powerful and valid institutions can be turned into idols.

Evolution happens to be one of the most profound scientific insights of the modern world. It is therefore particularly prone to be turned by some into idolatry. Evolution is a process whereby material things change; evolutionary naturalism is the assertion these processes alone explain the existence of all things. The former is a natural process like gravity or chemistry; the latter is idolatry. The Bible neither affirms nor denies evolution as a natural process. But the Bible has lots to say about idolatry in any form, including idolatrous uses of evolution.[16] The Bible warns against anything being worshiped in place of God, whether it be mammon or political power or biology.

The idolization of science is readily evident among many of the atheistic voices of our age. The late Stephen Hawking, for example, began his book *The Grand Design* by saying,

> Living in this vast world that is by turns kind and cruel, and gazing at the immense heavens above, people have always asked a multitude of questions: How can we understand the world in which we find ourselves? How does the universe behave? What is the nature of reality? Where did all this come from? Did the universe need a creator? . . . Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead. . . . Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge.[17]

The boldness of Hawking's assertion is stunning. But it is just that: an *assertion* to replace philosophy (by which he euphemistically targets theology) with science. By making the assertion, Hawking thereby admits the long-standing distinction. Historically, philosophy and theology have answered metaphysical

questions, while science confined itself to physical questions about the world. The novel assertion pressed by Hawking is idolatrous, positing the power of science to answer every question. But that is not science, nor is it the necessary implication of evolutionary science.

Christians must be careful to distinguish between evolution (a natural process) and evolutionary naturalism (an idolatrous, pseudoreligious presupposition). Granted its proper boundaries, science, including evolutionary science, is not necessarily atheistic—even though many atheists have employed evolution among their rhetorical arguments.

Evangelism and Evolution

Atheists often use evolution in their case against God. And evangelism is a major motivation for many Christian efforts to disprove evolution. Ken Ham, the founder of Answers in Genesis (AiG), is representative of this desire. "The Lord has raised up biblical creation organizations worldwide so that all necessary methods for evangelizing our society will be available. The Lord has provided us with a phenomenally powerful tool that needs to be used today: *creation evangelism*."[18]

When Charles Darwin popularized the idea that natural selection can explain the diversity of species, atheists recognized a powerful rhetorical argument to be enlisted in their cause. Evolution thereafter became a key tenet in modern arguments against the existence of God. Consequently, many evangelists have felt compelled to prove the existence of God by disproving evolution. But to argue against atheism does not necessarily require disproving evolution. Accepting the atheist's premise (that evolution disproves God) is to make a huge concession that actually undermines evangelism.[19] When we tell our children that belief in evolution undermines the existence of God, we are the ones teaching them they will have to abandon Christ if they ever find the arguments for evolution too persuasive to deny! Whether or not we believe that evolution took place, we should, instead, deny the presupposition that evolution must lead to atheism.

Why would we let the atheists stack the rules of the debate in this way? Yet leading creation apologists surrender this presuppositional point too quickly. For example, Ham writes, “For once, Richard Dawkins and I agree on something. There is a ‘deep incompatibility’ with evolution, millions of years, and God’s Word.”[20]

To concede the argument for God’s reality on those terms is like accepting Bart Ehrman’s assertion that the existence of hell is incompatible with a good God.[21] There is a certain, first blush semblance of sensibility in these assertions of Ehrman and Dawkins, but both presuppositions are actually rhetorical straw men that ought not be affirmed by Christians.

In his book *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, Alvin Plantinga has challenged this so-called deep incompatibility between the Bible and evolutionary science. With his typical thoroughness, Plantinga has shown that the reverse is actually the case: “There is superficial conflict but deep concord between science [including evolution] and theistic religion, but superficial concord and deep conflict between science and naturalism.”[22] Plantinga gives a much more solid framework than Ham for disputing atheism. The evangelistic motive behind many young earth creationist movements is noble, but the uncritical acceptance of the atheistic claim that Genesis is incompatible with evolution must be rejected.

Excursus: The Wisdom of Warfield

The two responses to Dawkins described above—that of Ken Ham, who accepts Dawkins’s presupposition, and that of Alvin Plantinga, who rejects it—have a long heritage. When Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in 1859, his insights were quickly recognized by atheists as powerful ideas that could be used to bolster their antireligious polemic. Christian leaders of the nineteenth century responded to the atheistic use of evolution in a variety of ways.

Some Christian leaders bought into the assertion that evolution, if true, would prove atheism. Charles Hodge wrote a popularly cited book called *What Is Darwinism?* (1874), in which he concluded, “We have thus arrived at the

answer to our question, What is Darwinism? It is Atheism."[23] It is understandable that leaders like Hodge would seek to cut off the new atheistic arguments that used evolutionary claims by refuting evolution. But by doing so, they also granted the atheistic polemic that if evolution is proven then Genesis and God are disproven.

Other orthodox leaders of the age were concerned not to surrender to that presupposition.[24] One of the leading theologians fighting to avoid this presuppositional fallacy (i.e., the *causal fallacy*) was Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. In an 1888 lecture, "Evolution or Development," Warfield asserted that there is no

> general statement in the Bible or any part of the account of creation, either as given in Gen I & II or elsewhere alluded to, that need be opposed to evolution. . . . The whole upshot of the matter is that there is no *necessary* antagonism of [the Bible] to evolution, *provided that* we do not hold to too extreme a form of evolution [i.e., evolutionary naturalism].[25]

Warfield was always cautious to avoid saying that the Bible taught or endorsed evolution.[26] Nevertheless, he also refused to accept that the Bible would be disproven if evolutionary science were true. This is remarkable since B. B. Warfield is the theologian now celebrated as the father of the modern defense of biblical inerrancy. Warfield's *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* continues to serve as a standard text on biblical inerrancy. Historians Mark Noll and David Livingstone observe, "One of the best-kept secrets in American intellectual history is that B. B. Warfield, the foremost modern defender of the theologically conservative doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible, was also an evolutionist."[27] That is probably an overstatement. Warfield was a theologian, not a scientist, and he seems to have remained skeptical of some claims of evolution.[28] But my point is that he remained open to the possibility and did not regard it as necessarily atheistic. And that, frankly, is a model of prudence. Theologians need not draw dogmatic conclusions on matters of science any more than scientists ought to dogmatize on theology.

Warfield's example is an important reminder that evolutionary science is not automatically proof for atheism. Other champions of orthodoxy also shared this concern not to confuse evolution with atheism. In fact, evolutionary science was

accepted by several of the original "fundamentalists"—authors of the series of essays called *The Fundamentals*, which defined conservative biblical convictions against emerging liberalism in the early twentieth century.[29] Nevertheless, the sentiment of Charles Hodge also spread widely through the church.[30]

Rather than heeding the prudence of leaders like Warfield, well-meaning apologists forced themselves into a corner where it became an essential proof of Scripture's veracity to be able to counter the mounting layers of evidence produced for the evolutionary model of nature. Now, two centuries later, the scientific evidence continues to mount. The farther scientific research into biological and cosmic evolution advances—building a case with staggering clarity and certitude—the more literal six-day creation arguments are found to be grasping at straws.[31] The late James Montgomery Boice wrote, "When everything [in the young earth creationist view] is considered, it seems to many persons (myself included) that the [young earth] creationists are running against too many lines of more or less independent evidence against their case on behalf of a young earth."[32] If Christians are taught that their confidence in Scripture depends on the ability to overturn the mounting evidence of the scientific enterprise, it is the Christian apologetic (not evolutionary science) that is to blame when young people "lose their faith" during college. Today, more than ever, defenders of biblical inerrancy need to recover the wisdom of Warfield.

Relating Faith and Science

Over the past several pages, I have said a fair bit about evolution. A reader might suppose that I am therefore advocating evolution. But I am actually arguing something different. While promoting the (as I believe it to be) right use of the creation narrative for practical guidance, I am also arguing for the text's removal from use in naturalistic inquiry.

This means, for example, that a preacher ought to exposit the Bible's various exhortations to promote health but should not attempt to research cures for ailments like cancer or heart disease from the Bible. We should pray for the sick,

but we should also encourage fellow Christians to consult with their doctors for treatment options. Medical science arises from the consensus research of medical experts and ought to be respected. We recognize that the medical consensus is fallible, and even a doctor's advice must be considered circumspectly—sometimes obtaining second or third opinions or exploring alternative approaches outside the mainstream. And if medical advice moves into moral decisions (as in matters of abortion), that is where biblical holiness provides boundaries between options. But we still rely on medical research to identify viable treatments. Medical decisions should be made based on medical research, not through absolutizing the period health practices of the apostle Paul (1 Tim 5:23) or the good Samaritan (Lk 10:34) or the prophet Isaiah (2 Kgs 20:7). I do not therefore advocate for any particular medical procedure but rather for careful consultation with those medically qualified to advocate on those matters. In the same manner, I do not advocate for or against evolution, but I seek to rein in efforts to constrain scientific research with ancient Near Eastern descriptions of nature.

From this stance, it is prudent to respect the consensus of the scientific community on natural origins, which, at present, happens to include evolution. Again, the consensus should not be accepted uncritically nor naively (as though biologists are any less fallible than medical doctors). Nevertheless, where the scientific consensus is critiqued, it should be critiqued from other scientific research. At present, that means evolution needs to be taken seriously, fully expecting its ongoing critique, refinement, and revision. There are several benefits to this approach. First, it allows us to focus on the practical and theological purposes of various biblical texts that contain features of ancient cosmology without getting caught trying to scientifically justify (or explain away) those features. Second, it allows us to witness in the modern world without falling into the false supposition that proving evolution disproves God. But there is a third fruit that I pray will emerge from this stance: a fruit of healing within the faith-science relationship more broadly.

Faith and science intersect at many points beyond the question of natural origins. But sadly, the heat emerging from the creation-evolution conflict has

had a toxic influence on a wide range of other areas. And while questions about God's creative processes are of limited practical relevance, many other points where faith and science meet have profoundly relevant, even life-threatening importance. But the skepticism toward modern science bred in creation-evolution debates often disposes Christians toward the same skepticism on other matters as well, such as mental illness, vaccinations, diet and nutrition, treatment for addictions, climate change, various medical therapies and branches of medicine, and a host of alternative therapies.

According to a 2009 survey by the Pew Research Center, "More than half of the [American] public (55%) says that science and religion are 'often in conflict'" and "Among those who attend religious services at least weekly, 46% say they see a conflict between science and their religious beliefs."[33] When asked for specific reasons for the conflict, 41 percent cite evolution. This is unfortunate. Scientific institutions are fallible. There are many reasons to critique the claims of mainstream science, just as there are many reasons to be critical of politics and business. Nevertheless, that so much of the church's suspicion (41 percent, according to this poll) is rooted in the evolution debate is stunning. That places a huge moral responsibility (Jas 3:1) on those who stoke those suspicions.

According to a study on vaccinations, "Religious reasons tend to account for the majority of total vaccine refusal[s]" in the United States.[34] The survey also took into consideration those who refused vaccinations for safety concerns, philosophical reasons, or medical questions. But the majority of those who refused claimed *religious* reasons! My point for citing this study is not to argue for or against vaccinations but to point out the tragedy that "religious reasons" are the driving motivation for most of the decisions to reject them. It would not be so concerning if parents were to opt out because of researched safety concerns (although the Food and Drug Administration requires extremely rigorous testing of vaccinations[35]) or for medical reasons. Medical decisions ought to be made based on medical reasons. It is the creation narrative that exhorts us to explore and subdue the world God gave to us, which includes

medical research. Yet ironically, anti-evolution-stoked suspicions of science are having an indirect but significant impact on the health of our children.[36]

Other impacted fields include addiction treatment and mental health care, where "biblical counseling" movements often deny the validity of mental illness[37] and express distrust of psychiatric research because of its "evolutionary basis."[38] Climate change is another frontier with significant implications for lives and communities as well as businesses, economies, and political structures. There may be viable scientific reasons to question the current consensus on climate change,[39] yet the proportion of Christians who are critical of climate change compared to the general public suggests the motivation is not really about science but rather part of the broader faith-science skepticism.[40]

By raising these examples, I do not intend a blanket endorsement of the mainstream position on any of these issues. I simply want to provide some current, real issues of importance in which large-scale Christian opposition has emerged for religious reasons, sometimes specifically motivated by Genesis interpretations. Christians ought to be critical thinkers, engaging with all areas of life and society.[41] But we should engage with science using the fallible tools of science, just as we engage with architecture using the fallible disciplines of architectural design, and so forth.

The previously mentioned Pew Research Center report shows that the creation-evolution controversy has contributed toward nearly half of American Christians regarding science as in conflict with their faith. This is not an ivory tower debate; this is a tension impacting real-life health care decisions, schooling choices, vocational pursuits, counseling options, and countless other important decisions of life. Restoring the practical use of the creation week narrative needs to be paired with its withdrawal from uses that fuel damaging faith-science polemics.[42]

Excursus: Geocentricity and Early Faith-Science Tensions

Darwinian evolution has provided the modern focus of faith-science debates, but the tension between faith and science has been with us since the birth of modern science. Because biblical authors wrote within the worldview of their times, their historically situated descriptions of nature matched those of the primitive societies in which they wrote. And those ancient conclusions about the nature of the world continued largely unchanged into medieval years. The natural worldview of the biblical authors was consistent with that of later audiences for centuries—until the advent of modern science. But as modern science emerged and radically changed the cultural perception of the cosmos, the church faced questions that it never had to address before. How are the nature descriptions in the Bible to be related to the new perceptions emerging from science? One of the first major fissures caused by this emerging question took place around Nicholas Copernicus's proposal that the earth and other planets revolved around the sun.

When Copernicus posited heliocentrism (that the planets orbit the sun), his theory was widely regarded as a useful model for predicting the movements of the planets but not an actual description of reality. It was thought at the time that his model could not be an actual description of the heavens because it was at odds with the worldview of the biblical authors.[43] After all, the Bible describes the world as immobile (Ps 93:1) and the sun as circling the earth (Josh 10:12-14; Ps 19:4-5). Initially, the Bible was regarded as giving a scientific description of planetary motion, and thus Copernicus's model might be a useful mathematical shortcut for making calculations but could not reflect the way planets actually moved. However, the Copernican model did eventually gain acceptance as the way the planets actually move. We have now come to accept that the Bible speaks of the "unmoving" earth and the sun's "rising" and "setting" because it speaks in the worldview of its audience. But initially, tension between theologians and natural philosophers (scientists) grew as the heliocentric model gained acceptance.

An English churchman named John Edwards argued in the late 1690s,

> The Copernican Opinion seems to confront a higher Principle than that of Reason. . . . Their Assertion is against the plain History of the Holy Book; for there we read that the Sun stood still in Joshua's time, and went back in King Hezekiah's. Now this Relation is either true or false. If it

> be the latter then the Inspired Scripture is false, which I take to be as great an Absurdity as any Man can be reduced to.

Edwards even offered observational evidence to support the immobile earth he believed to be required by a plain reading of the Bible:

> Again, I argue thus, the Motion of the Earth can be felt, or it cannot: If they hold it cannot, they are confuted by Earth-quakes . . . of which there are abundant Instances in History. . . . Are we presently apprehensive [i.e., aware] of the Earth's shaking never so little under us? And yet have no apprehension at all of our continual capering about the Sun? [44]

With very few exceptions, Bible-believing Christians today accept that the biblical authors used phenomenological language and that its descriptions of the sun's movements are not to be taken as scientific descriptions. Nevertheless, it was only as recently as 1838 that the Roman Catholic Church removed Copernicus's book from its *Index of Prohibited Books.* [45] And even to this day, there are some Christians (including scientists with advanced degrees) who insist on a geocentric universe based on a prescriptivistic reading of such passages in the Bible. "The essential argument [for geocentricity]," writes astronomy professor Gerardus Bouw, "is the inerrancy and preservation of Scripture. . . . At stake is the authority of the Bible in all realms, starting in the realm of science." [46] Very few Christians opposing evolution today include geocentrism in their worldview. Nevertheless, there is a common misunderstanding about the Bible that has persisted in faith-science controversies like these all through history, and a common tension between faith and science grows out of those controversies. To restore reverence for the gracious simplicity of God's Word so well articulated by Calvin ought to be paired with a reformation of those Christian suspicions toward science that have grown in the soil of those tensions.

The Christian Sabbath

Using a fork to pound nails rather than eat steak is both an abuse of the fork and a loss to the eater. Likewise, using the creation week narrative to argue science will distort our reading of the text and miss the practical benefit of *using* that calendar. It is the practice of the creation week that I want especially to

encourage. Embedded in the seventh day of the creation week (Gen 2:1-3) is the assurance that the good order of the world is finished, but the good purposes for the creation are yet to be fully enjoyed. God continues to advance his kingdom purposes in and through the labors of his people. As his purposes advance, the significance of the sabbath day also advances.

In the first giving of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17), the fourth commandment identified the sabbath with the seventh day of the creation week. But forty years later, Moses stood before a new generation on the border of the promised land and rehearsed the law again. In his second giving of the Ten Commandments there on the border in Moab (Deut 5:6-21), the promise of sabbath rest had moved "one big step" closer to fulfillment. God gave his people an even more vivid and profound testimony of his faithfulness to provide them with an abiding kingdom of rest and fruitfulness. As glorious as was the establishment of a good world with the seed of the human race in it, the gathering of a vast nation of people to the border of a fruitful land to make of them a kingdom was a step closer to the fulfillment of his creation purpose. Therefore, the motivation statement for sabbath rest was changed in this second giving of the Decalogue. Moses updated the fourth commandment to introduce the people's exodus from Egypt as another testimony of God's goodness to remember on the sabbath (Deut 5:12-15; cf. Heb 4:3-8). The creation paradigm was still instructive, but the tangible experience of the received land was even better.

Many generations later, the people of Israel lost the land. When they neglected God's laws and ignored his sabbaths, God sent the people into exile. In fact, he sent the people of Judah into exile for seventy years "until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths" (2 Chron 36:21). The prophet Jeremiah assured the people in captivity that God would one day return them to the land, and in that promise he announced another addition to the growing list of memories to attach to their sabbath hope. Jeremiah promised the people a new exodus from slavery, when God would bring them back to the land. In connection with that promise, Jeremiah wrote,

> Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say, "As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt," but, "As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel . . . out of all the countries [of their exile]." (Jer 23:7-8)

The exodus would continue to be the story line behind the people's festivals, but now the Babylonian return would also be remembered as an even greater and more recent demonstration of God's good purposes. According to Jeremiah, the return from Babylon would be added to the remembrances of festivals like the sabbath day.

In this manner, the focus of sabbath refreshment expands with each advance in God's unfolding promises. It is this Old Testament pattern that finds its further development on resurrection day in the New Testament, including its movement from the seventh day to the first day in light of Christ's resurrection. Luke describes the final Saturday sabbath of the apostles at the close of Luke 23: "On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment" (Lk 23:56). The next chapter begins, "But on the first day of the week" Jesus rose (Lk 24:1). The rest of that chapter describes how the disciples left their places of Saturday sabbath rest to head home, but the resurrected Jesus chased them down and called them back for a new resurrection day worship service. Luke describes the first Sunday worship observance as the disciples gathered to the upper room, where Jesus himself began the service with his pronouncement of peace and ended it with his benediction, filled in between with his own preaching, prayer, leading in praise, and fellowship (Lk 24:36-50). Luke and the parallel Gospel accounts show us the new paradigm for weekly worship, with the final seventh-day sabbath eclipsed by the new resurrection-focused Lord's Day. The resurrection was an even greater demonstration of God's ongoing promise to fulfill the good order and to beautify the society that he had established the world to host. John adds a further detail to indicate the permanence of this change, as he reports the disciples gathering to meet with Jesus again "eight days later" (Jn 20:26). By Hebraic inclusive counting, "the eighth day" means the subsequent Sunday.[47] During the forty days between his resurrection and his

ascension, it appears that Jesus met with his disciples on further Sundays for the Lord's Day worship (cf. Acts 1:3).[48]

This understanding of the sabbath day's development is consistent with the teaching of the early church, even from the generation following immediately after the apostles. In the *Epistle of Barnabas* (written sometime between the years 70 and 130), it is reported,

> The Sabbath is mentioned at the beginning of the creation [thus]: ". . . And he rested on the seventh day." . . . [But] when, giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world. Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead.[49]

Similarly, Ignatius of Antioch (35–108) described the church as those who "attained unto newness of hope, no longer observing sabbaths but fashioning their lives after the Lord's day, on which our life also arose through Him."[50]

Based on this New Testament instruction, and supported by such testimony from the early church, most Christians now hold that we are to gather for weekly worship and spiritual rest on the first day of the week (Jn 20:19, 26; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2).[51] The New Testament authors seem to have preferred the term *Lord's Day* (e.g., Rev 1:10) rather than *sabbath* in order to distinguish their first-day observance from the continued seventh-day observances of the Jews under the popularly recognized title *Sabbath*. Thus, when Paul exhorted the Colossians not to observe "food and drink, or . . . a festival or a new moon *or a Sabbath"* since "these are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col 2:16-17), it was probably the Jewish (seventh-day) sabbath that he exhorted the Colossians not to observe, along with the obsolescence of the food laws and the other festivals. The Lord's Day, however, was the New Testament adaptation of the sabbath that Paul himself observed and called the church to observe with him (e.g., Acts 20:7).[52]

The new term *Lord's Day* applied to the Christian adaptation of the sabbath is analogous to other terms like the *Lord's Supper* (1 Cor 11:20) as the New Testament adaptation of the Passover meal and the *church* (*ekklēsia*) as the New Testament adaptation of the synagogue (*sunagōgē*). But it is still the same principle of weekly rest and worship that is to be observed (Heb 4:1-16). And

some day, the sabbath will change one last time, when Christ gathers his saints into the eternal sabbath (Heb 4:9-11).

The cadence of labor and worship taught in the creation week calendar is the cadence that enables us to keep all our work framed in the joy of God's reign over us and his victories to provide us with present and eternal life. After the resurrection, now more than at any time before, we have reason to keep faith in the promises engaged through labor and worship in the cadence and vision of the creation week calendar.

Beyond Genesis 1

According to an old Jewish saying, "There are three things that are incomplete. Sleep is the incomplete experience of death; the dream is an incomplete form of prophecy; [and] the sabbath is the incomplete form of the world to come."[53] All three of those comparisons are anticipations of eternity, but the sabbath is the climax of that heavenly outlook. The sabbath—including its New Testament iteration as the Lord's Day—is designed to be a small foretaste that sustains our lively hope in the world to come. "The promise of entering his rest still stands," the author of Hebrews writes to the church, "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, . . . Let us therefore strive to enter that rest" (Heb 4:1-11).

When the Holy Spirit guided the compilation of the Pentateuch, the sabbath-week calendar was placed at the front—literally in its first chapter (Gen 1:1–2:3). The cadence taught in that passage is the foundation from which our vision for God's kingdom is unfolded in the rest of Scripture. This is not because scientific understanding is the foundation of our faith. It is the calling to labor and worship in sabbath-informed hope that provides the foundation of the Bible and the bedrock of a living faith (cf. 1 Cor 15:17-20). The same Spirit who inspired the Old Testament prophets to place the creation week at the front also inspired the apostle John's words about the consummation of the sabbath promise at the canon's close:

> Then I saw a new [lit., renewed] heaven and a new [lit., renewed] earth,[54] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." (Rev 21:1-5)

John's vision continues, adding a further description of the holy city in its beauty as the fulfillment of what was promised in the Garden of Eden, including restored access to the Tree of Life (Rev 21:9–22:5). This vision is the telos of what the sabbath promises. It is not a return to Eden but something much greater. It is the completion of the project begun in Eden. What started with one household in one garden will culminate in a glorious city at the center of the renewed—and abundantly fruitful—heavens and earth filled with his people. "By [the] light [of that city] will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it" (Rev 21:24). The fruitful labors appointed for the world at creation for sabbath enjoyment in God's presence will finally reach its full realization in the consummated kingdom. Labor will be conducted without tears and mourning (21:4, 24), with regular appearances at any time of any day (21:25) before the Lord God Almighty in worship (21:24-26; 22:3).

The cadence of labor and worship taught in the opening pages of the Bible is designed to prepare us for participation in the eternal kingdom envisioned in its final pages. The cadence of labor and worship taught in the creation week is designed to keep our mundane labors filled with consciousness of the Model Workman whose fruitful purposes we are to serve in our various garden plots and office cubicles. The punctuation of each week in worship—reflecting on the goodness of the Creator, the Redeemer from Egypt, the Restorer from Babylon, and the God of resurrection—strengthens our joy and hope in the purpose of our own redemption and continuing labor, week by week. We are not there yet. For the present, we still struggle among the thorns and thistles of a world burdened by sin. But God is the one who gave the world its proper order, with everything in place for its beauty and glory. In creation, the good order of the world is

finished and in place. In the cross, the good order of human righteousness is restored (cf. Gen 2:1-3; Jn 19:30). And in Christ, God has provided the True Adam (*hāʾādām*, Gen 1:27; 1 Cor 15:21-28) who will one day complete the kingdom appointed at creation for God's image bearers to steward in perfect peace. The sabbath promise is literally the framing paradigm of all Scripture.

In the dark hour of oppression and suffering of Nehemiah's day, the remnant in Jerusalem learned to declare in praise of God, "You made known [to our fathers] your holy Sabbath" (Neh 9:14). The sabbath was not just one of the commands taught through Moses. The sabbath was a promise, a seal of God's purpose stamped into the creation itself. The sabbath was given as "a covenant" and "a sign" of God's eternal commitment to his people (Ex 31:16-17). The creation calendar is still available to lift our hearts and shape our vision for our weekly labors in hope.

In our age of intense social strain, economic pressures, political tensions, and widespread Christian lukewarmness, we don't need better science from Genesis 1 (as wonderful as science is). We need to bring our mundane labors into the worshipful cadence of hope and faith taught in the Genesis 1 creation week calendar.

> *This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*
>
> *PSALM 118:24*

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NOTES

Preface

1. Michael LeFebvre, *Collections, Codes, and Torah: The Re-Characterization of Israel's Written Law*, LHBOTS 451 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006); Michael LeFebvre, "Legal Institutions," *OEBL* 1: 536-43.

2. E.g., Michael LeFebvre, "Theology and Economics in the Biblical Year of Jubilee," *BET* 2, no. 1 (2015): 31-51; Michael LeFebvre, *Leviticus: A 12-Week Study*, Knowing the Bible (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

3. My ordination is held by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), a denomination that subscribes to the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) and generally holds to a literal six-day reading of the Genesis 1 creation week. However, in response to a question about the WCF's statement on the creation days (WCF 4.1), the 2002 synod of the RPCNA acknowledged that "differing views of the length of these days are held by some in the church" and affirmed that questions about the nature of the days need to be allowed room for engagement and examination. I write, therefore, not as a representative of the general position of my denomination on this subject, but within the space allowed for engaging current debates about this text.

4. See www.pastortheologians.com.

Introduction

1. In New Testament times, twelve hours were counted from sunrise to sunset. Sunrise during the Passover week (being the week of the spring equinox) would have been at about 6:00 a.m. and sunset close to 6:00 p.m. Wolfram Alpha (www.wolframalpha.com) reports a 5:44 a.m. sunrise on April 4, AD 30 (that being the day after Passover that year), and a sunset at 6:20 p.m. Scholars believe Jesus' crucifixion took place at Passover sometime between AD 30 and 33.

2. Augustine Stock further suggests that Mark's division of the crucifixion narrative into precise quarters of the day was to align key events with the three points for prayer in period Jewish liturgy. Augustine Stock, *The Method and Message of Mark* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), 355-56.

3. Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave; A Commentary on the Passion Narratives of the Four Gospels* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:1351-73; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1:386-402; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 684-95; Barry

D. Smith, "The Chronology of the Last Supper," *WTJ* 53 (1991): 29-45; Colin Humphreys, *The Mystery of the Last Supper: Reconstructing the Final Days of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

4. Edward W. Klink III, *John*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 784.

5. On the use of chronology throughout the book of John and the concept of time in the New Testament world generally, see Douglas Estes, *The Temporal Mechanics of the Fourth Gospel: A Theory of Hermeneutical Relativity in the Gospel of John*, BibInt 92 (Leiden: Brill, 2008); and Douglas Estes, "Time," in Douglas Estes and Ruth Sheridan, eds., *How John Works: Storytelling in the Fourth Gospel*, RBS 86 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 41-57.

6. Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); John Barton, *The Old Testament: Canon Literature and Theology; Collected Essays of John Barton* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 53-66.

7. Quoted in Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 80.

8. Many difficulties concerning the Passion Week are solved when we abandon anachronistic assumptions about chronology. Ben Witherington notes, "A great deal of controversy has arisen as to whether Mark is really suggesting that all the events of 10:46–16:8 took place in a single week. Actually we can only trace to the fourth century A.D. the church tradition that all these things transpired during what came to be called Passion Week. We have already seen in Mark several examples of what looks like compressed chronology . . . It has even been suggested that Mark is recording events that happened during several festal seasons in Jerusalem. For example, in the month of Yishri (September–October) a festival was held called Tabernacles, involving cries of Hosanna as one entered the city; singing of the Hallel psalms (Pss. 113–18); waving of green branches, even palm branches; traditions involving Zech. 9–13; and a focus on the Mount of Olives, on the temple, as well as on Gentiles. All of these elements are found in the story of Jesus' triumphal entry, and this is hard to account for if in fact the entry in question took place during Passover. John 12, of course, strongly suggests a one-week chronology of these events, but this may be a theological construct suggesting Jesus' reconstruction of the world in a week." Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 307-8. Cf. James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 332-33. Consider also the description of Jesus' appointed time in the tomb as "three days and three nights" in Mt 12:40, an expression that cannot be regarded as a precise calculation but rather as idiomatic for three days including both nighttime and daytime (rather than simply the daylight hours). Cf. Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook: Matthew 1–12* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 574.

9. E.g., Frank H. Polak, "Poetic Style and Parallelism in the Creation Account (Genesis 1.1–2.3)," in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, JSOTSup 319, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 2-31; Francis Collins, *The Language of God* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 150-51, 206-7.

10. E.g., John D. Currid, "Theistic Evolution Is Incompatible with the Teachings of the Old Testament," in *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*, ed. J. P. Moreland et al. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 860-62; C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 40-44.

11. E.g., Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 49-56; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 93-94.

Chapter 1: Calendars in the Sky

1. Philippe Guillaume, *Land and Calendar: The Priestly Document from Genesis 1 to Joshua 18*, LHBOTS 391 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 47. Cf. Richard S. Hess, "Multiple-Month Ritual Calendars in the West Semitic World: Emar 446 and Leviticus 23," in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Alan Millard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 233-53; Daniel E. Fleming, *Time at Emar: The Cultic Calendar and the Rituals from the Diviner's Archive* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 218-21.

2. Sacha Stern suggests that the invention of a calendar governed by mathematical rules rather than by natural observations led to the desacralization of time and made it a secular entity. Sacha Stern, *Time and Process in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), 66.

3. Theodor Hertzl Gaster called it a "Filling" principle: "The activities [of the typical festival year] fall into two main divisions which we may call, respectively, rites of Kenosis, or Emptying, and rites of Plerosis, or Filling. The former portray and symbolize the eclipse of life and vitality at the end of each lease, and are exemplified by lenten periods, fasts, austerities, and other expressions of mortification or suspended animation. The latter, on the other hand, portray and symbolize the revitalization which ensues at the beginning of the new lease, and are exemplified by rites of mass mating, ceremonial purgations of evil and noxiousness (both physical and 'moral'), and magical procedures designed to promote fertility, produce rain, relume the sun, and so forth." Theodor Hertzl Gaster, *Thespis: Ritual, Myth and Drama in the Ancient Near East* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 23. Gaster's groundbreaking study of this pattern documented a similar "Seasonal Pattern" in the liturgical festivals across the ancient world. His "Seasonal Pattern" was in fact too simplistic, but his basic insight remains important. For critique of Gaster's "ritual pattern," see Karl-Heinz Bernhardt, *Das Problem der altorientalischen Königsideologie im Alten Testament: Unter besondere Berücksichtigung der Geschichte der Psalmenexegese dargestellt und kritischgewürdigt*, VTSup 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1961).

4. G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 111; Johannes C. de Moor, *The Seasonal Pattern in the Ugaritic Myth of Baʿlu: According to the Version of Ilimilku*, AOAT 16 (Kevalaer, Ger.: Burtzon and Bercker, 1971).

5. Gaster, *Thespis*, 124.

6. Tryggve Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: Dying and Rising Gods in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013).

7. Mark E. Cohen, *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1993), 7-8.

8. Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, 390, 402.

9. Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in the Light of History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 7-8.

10. Vincent Arieh Tobin, "Myths: An Overview," in *OEAE*, 2:464-68. Cf. Gaster, *Thespis*, 377-405; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 164; Frank Moore Cross, "The Epic Traditions of Early Israel: Epic Narrative and the Reconstruction of Early Israelite Institutions," in *The Poet and the Historian: Essays in Literary and Historical Biblical Criticism*, ed. Richard Elliott Friedman (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 27; Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 131-36; Rosalie David, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 157-58.

11. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 9-12.

12. Cf. Walter Vogels, "The Cultic and Civil Calendars of the Fourth Day of Creation (Gen 1,14b)," *SJOT* 11, no. 2 (1997), 167.

13. Vogels, "Cultic and Civil Calendars," 169.

14. E.g., Colin J. Humphreys, "The Star of Bethlehem, A Comet in 5 BC and the Date of Christ's Birth," *TynBul* 43, no. 1 (1992): 31-56.

15. So ESV, NASB, KJV, NKJV, NRSV. But "festivals" in HCSB and "sacred times" in NIV.

16. Walter Vogels, "Cultic and Civil Calendars," 165-66. Cf. Hendrik L. Bosman, "4595) מועד a)," *NIDOTTE* 2:781-82. "The plural form of מועד means 'festivals' one hundred percent of the time in the Torah." David J. Rudolph, "Festivals in Genesis 1:14," *TynBul* 54, no. 2 (2003): 40.

17. It is possible that the "week" should also be considered part of this merism, but it is likely that the week is not really a natural division of time like the solar day, lunar month, and solar year but instead a consequence of the sabbath (one of the festivals) occurring every seventh day.

18. Guillaume, *Land and Calendar*, 38. Cf. Stern, *Time and Process*, 2-3.

19. "The vocable יום [*yôm*], like its translations 'day/Tag/jour' etc., often does not signify a spell of twenty-four hours, but rather pertains specifically to the 'sun-lit' part of this span of time, in distinction from לילה [*laylâ*], 'night/Nacht/nuit,' which designates its 'sun-less' and therefore dark part." Shemaryahu Talmon, "Reckoning the Sabbath in the First and the Early Second Temple Period —From the Evening or the Morning?," in *Sabbath: Idea, History, Reality*, ed. Gerald J. Blidstein (Beersheba, Israel: Ben Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2004), 10.

20. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 2026; Julian Morgenstern, "Supplemental Studies in the Calendar of Ancient Israel," *HUCA* 10 (1935): 15-28; H. R. Stroes, "Does the Day Begin in the Evening or Morning? Some Biblical Observations," *VT* 16 (1966): 462-63.

21. Talmon, "Reckoning the Sabbath," 14-16; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2026.

22. The reason for this unusual evening-to-evening timing was likely because the Day of Atonement was the only holy day that required fasting. If the fasting was appointed for the normal day (i.e., the morning of the 10th until the morning of the 11th), the people would have been required to fast thirty-six hours since they would have had their last meal the previous evening. By making the Day of Atonement *fast* an evening-to-evening observance, the people fasted only twenty-four hours.

23. So, e.g., Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 123; G. Ch. Aalders, *Genesis*, The Bible

Student's Commentary, trans. William Heynen, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 1:58; and Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 19.

24. C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 55-56; Guillaume, *Land and Calendar*, 37.

25. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 1967-68, 2025-26; Talmon, "Reckoning the Sabbath"; Stroes, "Does the Day Begin in the Evening or Morning?," 460-75.

26. Trumpet blasts, which would be heard locally, may have been supplemented with fire signals to communicate over longer distances. Jer 6:1 speaks of a signal spread by both "blow[ing] the trumpet" and "rais[ing] a signal [*maśʾēt*, meaning a 'fire signal']." Cf. G. Dossin, "Signaux lumineux au pays de Mari," *RA* 35 (1938): 174-86; J. J. Finkelstein, "Some New *Misharum* Material and Its Implications," *Assyriological Studies* 16 (1965): 236; and Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2163.

27. Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, "'Lights Serving as Signs for Festivals' (Genesis 1:14B) in Enūma Eliš and Early Judaism," in *The Creation of Heaven and Earth: Re-interpretations of Genesis 1 in the Context of Judaism, Ancient Philosophy, Christianity, and Modern Physics*, Themes in Biblical Narrative: Jewish and Christian Traditions 8, ed. George H. van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 35, summarizing Alasdair Livingstone's assessment of Neo-Assyrian texts.

28. E.g., Samuel M. Kamakau, *Works of the People of Old: Na Hana a ka Po'e Kahiko* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1976), 17.

29. Francesca Rochberg-Halton, "Calendars, Ancient Near East," *ABD*, 1:810; Jack M. Sasson, *From the Mari Archives: An Anthology of Old Babylonian Letters* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 242n21. Contra Leo Depuydt, "Why Greek Lunar Months Began a Day Later than Egyptian Lunar Months, Both Before First Visibility of the New Crescent," in *Living the Lunar Calendar*, ed. Jonathan Ben-Dov et al. (Oxford: Oxbrow Books, 2012), 119-71.

30. Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, 4. Cf. *m. Rosh Hashshanah* 1:3-9; and Stern, *Time and Process*, 65-66.

31. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 1975, 2011-13. Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, 6-8.

32. David C. Hopkins, "Life on the Land: The Subsistence Struggles of Early Israel," *BA* 50 (September 1987): 184; John D. Currid and David P. Barrett, *ESV Bible Atlas* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 33.

33. Daniel E. Fleming, "Intercalation: The Problem of Seasonal Adjustment in a Lunar Calendar," in *Time at Emar*, 214-18; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 1964.

34. Although, "In halakhic exegesis 'observe the month of new ears of grain' [Deut 16:1] serves as the Scriptural warrant for creating leap years by periodically adding an extra month to the year to coordinate the lunar year with the solar year. . . . The verse was read as meaning: be sure that Passover falls in the month when new ears of grain have actually appeared, and if the grain will not reach that stage after the month of Adar, add an additional month (Adar II) to the year." Jeffrey Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPS Commentary (Philadelphia: JPS, 1996 [5756]), 153.

35. Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, 5. Cf. Francesca Rochberg-Halton, "Calendars," *ABD* 1:811.

36. Compare the Islamic calendar, which is strictly lunar, so that the feast of Ramadan wanders through the seasons of the year.

37. Rochberg-Halton, "Calendars," 1:811; H. Hunger and E. Reiner, "A Scheme for Intercalary Months from Babylonia," *WZKM* 67 (1975): 21-28.

38. Julian Morgenstern, “The Three Calendars of Ancient Israel,” *HUCA* 1 (1924): 64-71; J. B. Segal, “Intercalation and the Hebrew Calendar,” *VT* 7, no. 3 (1957): 250-307. It is sometimes thought that the jubilee year was an intercalary period introduced every forty-nine years (e.g., E. R. Leach, “A Possible Method of Intercalation for the Calendar of the Book of Jubilees,” *VT* 7, no. 4 [1957]: 392-97). But Leviticus describes the jubilee as another sabbath year (i.e., a full year). Furthermore, waiting half a century to intercalate is too long. Since the incongruity of lunar and solar years would increase by eleven days every year! Cf. the discussion of the jubilee year in the next chapter.

39. The spring new year was also observed in Babylon, but not in Canaan. Morgenstern, “Three Calendars of Ancient Israel,” 69; Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, 14-20.

40. Translation is from Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Boston, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2002), 38.

41. Richard S. Hess, “Multiple-Month Ritual Calendars in the West Semitic World: Emar 446 and Leviticus 23,” in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Alan Millard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 242.

42. Although this custom is widely observed in postbiblical Judaism, it is rooted in a misunderstanding of the biblical phrases “turning of the year” (*təqûpat haššānâ*; Ex 34:22, a.t.) and “going out of the year” (*ṣēʾt haššānâ*; Ex 23:16, a.t.) as used in connection with the seventh month. There were some ancient cultures that did observe two overlapping years, with the spring equinox as the start of the civil year and the autumn equinox as the start of the agricultural year. This was the custom, for instance, in first millennium Uruk and in third millennium Ur (Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, 400-406). There is no evidence that this was the practice in biblical Israel, however. David J. A. Clines, “The Evidence for an Autumnal New Year in Pre-Exilic Israel Reconsidered,” *JBL* 93 (1974): 22-40. Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2011-18. Note further that all four festival lists in the Old Testament begin with Passover / Unleavened Bread (Ex 23:14-17; 34:18-24; Lev 23:4-43; Num 28:18–29:40; Deut 16:1-17).

43. This calendrical emphasis on springtime blossoming correlates with the ritual emphasis on new life in the structure of Israel’s temple, where the menorah was a stylized almond tree (the first tree to bud in spring). The Hebrew name for the almond is *šāqēd*, which means “watching” or “waking one,” due to its marking the awakening of new life in the springtime. Keith N. Schoville, “שׁקד (9193),” *NIDOTTE* 4:230-31. The lamp stand in the temple was formed to look like a stylized almond tree, with its entire lifecycle (its buds, blossoms, and almond fruit) simultaneously molded into its branches (Ex 25:31-40). Many scholars believe the menorah was a stylized Tree of Life. Carol Meyers, “Lampstand,” *ABD*, 4:142; Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 90-95. Thus, the promise of new life was found both in the cadence of holy time (the calendar) and at the heart of holy space (the temple).

44. Ancient Rome originally began its new year in March with the beginning of springtime, but in 153 BC the Roman new year was changed to January for political reasons. It is that custom that we have inherited in the modern West. Nevertheless, many of our Roman month names still reflect the original March beginning of the year: September (*septem* means “seven”), October (*octo* means “eight”), November (*novem* means “nine”), and December (*decem* means “ten”) are all named based on March as the first month.

45. P. P. Jensen, “שָׁבַע (8679),” *NIDOTTE*, 4:34-37.

Chapter 2: Cycles of Sevens

1. Gary G. Cohen, "שָׁבַע (2318)," *TWOT* 2:898.

2. P. P. Jensen, "שָׁבַע (8679)," *NIDOTTE* 4:34-37.

3. On various efforts to explain the origin of the seven-day week, see G. F. Hasel, "Sabbath," *ABD* 5:850-51.

4. E.g., Hildegard Lewy and Julius Lewy, "The Origin of the Week and the Oldest West Asiatic Calendar," *HUCA* 17 (1942–1943): 1-2; William W. Hallo, "New Moons and Sabbaths: A Case-Study in the Contrastive Approach," *HUCA* 48 (1977): 1-18. Cf. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part One: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 65-69. Contra Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 475-83. Cf. Gnana Robinson, *The Origin and Development of the Old Testament Sabbath: A Comprehensive Exegetical Approach*, BBET 21 (New York: Peter Lang, 1988); Hendrick Bosman, "Sabbath," *NIDOTTE*, 4:1157-58; Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in the Light of History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 20; Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, "'Lights Serving as Signs for Festivals' (Genesis 1:14B) in Enūma Eliš and Early Judaism," in *The Creation of Heaven and Earth: Re-interpretations of Genesis 1 in the Context of Judaism, Ancient Philosophy, Christianity, and Modern Physics*, Themes in Biblical Narrative: Jewish and Christian Traditions 8, ed. George H. van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 47.

5. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 20. Cf. Hildegard and Lewy, "Origin of the Week," 3; S. Langdon, *Babylonian Menologies and Semitic Calendars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), 83-87, 95-96; Francis H. Colson, *The Week: An Essay on the Origin and Development of the Seven-Day Cycle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 12n5. Cf. *Enūma eliš* 5:12-22.

6. P. P. Jensen, "שָׁבַע (8679)," *NIDOTTE*, 4:34-37.

7. Ditlef Nielson, *Die altarabische Mondreligion und die mosaische Überlieferung* (Strassburg: Verlag von Karl J. Trübner, 1904), 52-88. Cf. the related concept of the solstice as when the sun (Latin, *sol*) is "standing" (Latin, *stare*).

8. Philippe Guillaume, *Land and Calendar: The Priestly Document from Genesis 1 to Joshua 18*, LHBOTS 391 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 40.

9. For more on the "ideal" month, see the section "Schematic Calendars and the Pentateuch" in chapter 6.

10. Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Seven Day Circle: The History and Meaning of the Week* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 10.

11. Agnes Kirsopp Michels, *The Calendar of the Roman Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 21.

12. Colson, *Week*, 3.

13. See “The Year” in chapter 1.

14. On the marginal nature of the night, see “The Day” in chapter 1.

15. Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature: A Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts* (Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1949), 5. Cf. Cyrus H. Gordon, “Sabbatical Cycle or Seasonal Pattern? Reflections on a New Book,” *Or* 22 (1953): 79-81; Edward Neufeld, “Socio-Economic Background of Yōbēl and Šemiṭṭā,” *RSO* 33 (1958): 53-124; Raymond Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law*, JSOTSup 113 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 42-43.

16. H. Vogelstein, *Die Landwirtschaft in Palästina*, 48, trans. David C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, SWBAS 3 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 194.

17. Cf. Michael LeFebvre, “Theology and Economics in the Biblical Year of Jubilee,” *BET* 2, no. 1 (2015): 45-47; Michael LeFebvre, “Theology and Economics in the Biblical Year of Jubilee,” *RPTJ* 1, no. 2 (2015): 26-29.

18. Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2002), 149; Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 195-97.

19. Borowski, *Agriculture in Israel*, 151.

20. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 201.

21. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2160.

22. For more detailed examination of the sabbath year, see Michael LeFebvre, “Theology and Economics in the Biblical Year of Jubilee,” *BET* 2, no. 1 (2015): 31-51; “Theology and Economics in the Biblical Year of Jubilee,” *RPTJ* 1, no. 2 (2015): 13-32.

23. Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, JSOTSup 141 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 318-21.

24. John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC 4 (Dallas: Word Books, 192), 434-36. Contra the traditional Talmudic view (*b. Ned.* 61a, b; *Ros Haš.* 9a; *Sifra Behar* 6), see Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 319. Benedict Zuckerman identifies six major ways that the sabbatical and jubilee year cycles have been related through history. See Benedict Zuckerman, *A Treatise of the Sabbatical Cycle and the Jubilee: A Contribution to the Archaeology and Chronology of the Time Anterior and Subsequent to the Captivity; Accompanied by a Table of Sabbatical Years*, trans. A. Löwy (repr., New York: Hermon Press, 1974), 10-17.

25. The customary timing for such edicts was at the start a new king’s reign, but the king also had the authority to proclaim occasional “surprise” edicts of liberty (always with carefully defined parameters) at any time he saw it was needed. Cf. the detailed discussion of Ammiṣaduqa’s Edict by J. J. Finkelstein, “The Edict of Ammiṣaduqa: A New Text,” *RA* 63 (1969): 45-64.

26. LL, i.20-ii.15. Translation from Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, SBLWAW 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 24-25.

27. Note that ancient societies restarted their counting of years at the ascent of each new king, thus identifying generation change with the reign of each king.

28. J. J. Finkelstein, “Some New *Misharum* Material and Its Implications,” *Assyriological Studies* 16 (1965): 233-46; Finkelstein, “Edict of Ammiṣaduqa,” 45-64; Moshe Weinfeld, “‘Justice and Righteousness’ in Ancient Israel Against the Background of ‘Social Reforms’ in the Ancient Near East,” in *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbuarn*, Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale 25, ed. H.-J. Nissen and J. Renger (Berlin: Reimer, 1982), 491-519; Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); D. J. Wiseman, “Law and Order in Old Testament Times,” *VE* 8 (1973): 5-21; N.-P. Lemche, “*Andurārum* and *mîšarum:* Comments on the Problem of Social Edicts and Their Application in the Ancient Near East,” *JNES* 38 (1979): 11-22. For a critique of such comparisons, see J. P. J. Olivier, “The Old Babylonian Mēšarum-Edict and the Old Testament” (D. Litt. thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1977).

29. For further discussion of Zechariah’s jubilee, see LeFebvre, “Theology and Economics in the Biblical Year of Jubilee,” *BET* 2, no. 1 (2015): 45-47; and LeFebvre, “Theology and Economics in the Biblical Year of Jubilee,” *RPTJ* 1, no. 2 (2015): 26-29.

Chapter 3: The Festivals of Israel

1. David C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, SWBAS 3 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 213.

2. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 246, citing Fredrik Barth, "A General Perspective on Nomad-Sedentary Relations in the Middle East," 14, in Cynthia Nelson, *The Desert and the Sown: Nomads in the Wider Society*, Research Series 21 (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of International Studies, 1973), 11-21.

3. Shunya Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel: The Institution of the Family (Beit ʾAb) from the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy*, JBS 7 (Jerusalem: Simor, 1996).

4. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 253.

5. Israel's festival calendar is listed in several passages in the Bible: Ex 23:14-19; 34:18-24; Lev 23:4-44; Num 28:11–29:40; Deut 16:1-17. The Leviticus passage is the most complete, so primarily Leviticus references will be cited in this chapter.

6. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 225; Lucian Turkowski, "Peasant Agriculture in the Judaean Hills," *PEQ* 101 (1969): 21-33, 101-13.

7. Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 128.

8. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1988-89.

9. The offerings of Cain and Abel probably represent the Festival of Firstfruits, when the first barley sheaves and the first lambs of spring lambing season could both be presented (Gen 4:3-4).

10. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2062.

11. Some households might bring "not quite ripe" barley to the festival, but premature barley is actually a favored food. "Though it cannot be ground to flour," nearly ripe barley was "rendered palatable by parching and grinding to grits." H. L. Ginsberg, quoted in Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 193-95. Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 193-95; and Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 1983, 1988-99.

12. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 257.

13. The interpretation of this phrase is famously vexed. Milgrom called it "the most long-lasting schism in the history of the Jewish people." Milgrom identifies four common interpretations: "those who hold that the word 'sabbath' refers to the weekly sabbath—either the one falling during the week of the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Samaritans, Karaites) or the one falling after the festival (Boethusians, Qumran)—and those who hold that the sabbath means the day of rest from laborious work prescribed for this festival, either the first day (the Pharisees; cf. LXX on v. 11; Philo, *Laws*

2.162; Jos. *Ant.* 3.250) or the seventh day (Pesh., modern Falashas; Gerstenberger 1996: 344)." Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2057. See Milgrom's extended discussion of these four views in Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2056-63. Cf. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 304.

14. Baruch Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, AB 4A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 379, 380-81.

15. Cf. Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 122-25.

16. The Feast of Weeks was called Pentecost (*pentēkostē*) in Greek because of its occurring on the fiftieth day after Firstfruits. It was forty-nine days from Firstfruits counting exclusively, but it was called the fiftieth day because of the Hebrew use of inclusive counting. (See the explanation of inclusive versus exclusive counting in "The Jubilee Year" section in chapter 2.)

17. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 225.

18. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 224.

19. The centralization of worship emphasized in the book of Deuteronomy points to all the pilgrimage festivals being celebrated altogether, as a nation, in one city: Jerusalem. "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths" (Deut 16:16). But the provision of Levitical cities spread out strategically throughout the various regions of Israel (Num 35:1-8; Josh 21:1-42) invites speculation whether, as the nation's land size grew, certain festival pilgrimages might have occurred at regional centers rather than requiring travel all the way to Jerusalem. Practically, this would make sense both for the sake of travel and for regional labor and welfare coordination. However, if such practical alternatives were ever observed, no record of it is retained in the biblical writings. Instead, the idyllic vision of the nation gathered at God's temple in Jerusalem is consistently upheld in the Old Testament festival narratives.

20. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 227.

21. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 228.

22. Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2002), 115.

23. Denis Baly, *The Geography of the Bible: A Study in Historical Geography* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 101. Cf. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 231.

24. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 230-32; Borowski, *Agriculture in Israel*, 26.

25. Carey Ellen Walsh, *The Fruit of the Vine: Viticulture in Ancient Israel*, HSM 60 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 110-19.

26. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 228-30; Borowski, *Agriculture in Israel*, 102-14.

27. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 226.

28. Borowski, *Agriculture of Canaan*, 62-69, 111-14, 120-26; Walsh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 148-65.

29. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 243; Borowski, *Agriculture in Israel*, 135-39.

30. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 248.

31. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 245-50.

32. This is the festival commonly called Rosh Hashanah (New Year's Day) in modern Judaism, through a misunderstanding of the terms for the autumnal equinox—*təqûpat haššānâ* (lit., "turning of the year") in Ex 34:22 and *ṣēʾt haššānâ* (lit., "going out of the year") in Ex 23:16—as meaning "beginning of the year." See "The Year" and the excursus "New Year's Day in Israel and Canaan" in chapter 1.

33. Karl Weyde, *The Appointed Festivals of YHWH: The Festival Calendar in Leviticus 23 and the Sukkot Festival in Other Biblical Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 91.

34. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2023.

35. The Day of Atonement law (Lev 16:1-34) also happens to be in the structural center of the book of Leviticus. Michael LeFebvre, *Leviticus: A 12-Week Study*, KTB (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 9, 47.

36. See the discussion of the sabbath year and the year of jubilee in chapter two.
See also Michael LeFebvre, "Theology and Economics in the Biblical Year of Jubilee," *BET* 2, no. 1 (2015): 31-51; and Michael LeFebvre, "Theology and Economics in the Biblical Year of Jubilee," *RPTJ* 1, no. 2 (2015): 13-32.

37. David C. Hopkins, "Life on the Land: The Subsistence Struggles of Early Israel," *BA* 50 (September 1987): 188.

38. Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 31.

39. *m. Sukkah* 5:4; Erich Zenger, "The Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of Psalms, Psalms 107–145," *JSOT* 80 (1998): 98, 100-101.

40. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 86.

41. See the soil moisture table in Hopkins, "Life on the Land," 184.

42. Borowski, *Agriculture in Israel*, 48.

43. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 228.

44. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 233.

45. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 86.

46. On the possibility of lunar weeks in Israel, see "The Week" in chapter 2.

Chapter 4: The Festival Stories of Israel

1. See table at the end of this chapter. Cf. Frederick Cryer, “The Interrelationships of Gen 5,32; 11,10–11 and the Chronology of the Flood (Gen 6–9),” *Biblica* 66, no. 2 (1985): 249. The dates in this list are based on the Masoretic Text (MT). The Septuagint (LXX) gives different dates in some places. Gerhard Larsson has argued that the dates preserved in the MT are primary and those preserved in the LXX represent later developments. Gerhard Larsson, “The Chronology of the Pentateuch: A Comparison of the MT and LXX,” *JBL* 102, no. 3 (1983): 401-9. In addition to twenty-one dated events, there are five festival lists that include the festival dates: Ex 23:10-17; 34:18-24; Lev 23:4-43; Num 28:18–29:40; Deut 16:1-17.

2. Sacha Stern, *Time and Process in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), 12. Cf. Michael LeFebvre, “Reading Genesis One with the Fourth Commandment: The Creation Week as a Calendar Narrative,” in *Creation and Doxology: The Beginning and End of God’s Good World*, ed. Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 7-21.

3. Event sequencing is not just a different method for recording temporality; it reflects a different way for conceiving of the very idea of time. Sacha Stern explains, “Ethnographers have found that in many —if not *all*—‘primitive’ or non-modern societies, the concept of time as a[n] entity in itself simply does not exist. Reality is explained in terms of events, changes, and processes, but in these world-views, the notion of ‘pure time’ or an overarching ‘time-dimension’ is completely absent and unknown.” Stern, *Time and Process*, 12. The idea that time is an independent reality by which all events might be plotted is a relatively recent concept in history. Norbert Elias traces the reification of time to the rise of modern science in the mathematical descriptions of Galileo, Newton, and their peers. Sacha Stern argues that the objectivization of time can be traced further back to the philosophical revolution of ancient Hellenism. Furthermore, according to Douglas Estes, “Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609) . . . was arguably the first scholar to propose an absolute chronology.” Douglas Estes, “Time,” in *How John Works: Storytelling in the Fourth Gospel*, Resources for Biblical Study 86, ed. Douglas Estes and Ruth Sheridan (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 46n15. In any case, the now pervasive and seemingly instinctual perception of time as an objective reality (a conception that Relativity Theory has recently begun to unravel) was not part of the biblical world. Norbert Elias, *Time: An Essay* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 106-7; Stern, *Time and Process*, 91-102.

4. Even when dates do appear, they are placed within the story’s own boundaries rather than identifying with an abstract, overarching timeline. For example, dated events of the Genesis flood are dated by the years of Noah’s life (e.g., “In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month.” Gen 7:11), while dates of the exodus are identified from the

year of leaving Egypt (e.g., “On the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt.” Num 1:1).

5. Jan van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars* (Leiden: Brill, 1961); Jan van Goudoever, “The Liturgical Significance of the Date in Dt 1,3,” in *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft*, BETL 68, ed. Norbert Lohfink (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985), 145-48.

6. Van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars*, 54. Cf. Mark Smith and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*, JSOTSup 239 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 290-98. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to the dates of the Pentateuch since Van Goudoever (per Smith and Bloch-Smith, *Pilgrimage Pattern*, 290-91). Jeremy Hughes gave extensive attention to “the schematic nature of Biblical chronology” (p. 2) with reference to years (including patriarchal ages and royal regnal years), but his work did not address specific dates. Jeremy Hughes, *Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology*, JSOTSup 66 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

7. See event numbers 1, 5, 11, and 17 on the “Pentateuch Calendar” at the end of this chapter.

8. “In every generation a person is duty-bound to regard himself as if he personally has gone forth from Egypt, since it is said, *And you shall tell your son in that day saying, It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt* (Ex. 13:8).” *Pes.* 10.5 in Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 250. Cf. Amos Frisch’s conclusions regarding dates in 1 Kings: “This very system of dating comes to demonstrate *a relationship between two events.*” Amos Frisch, “The Exodus Motif in 1 Kings 1–14,” *JSOT* 87 (2000): 6.

9. The actual date of Jesus’ birth is not known. December 25th was adopted to align commemoration of his birth with the winter solstice, the date when night is at its longest and from whence the days begin to overtake the night in length. Augustine preached, “Hence it is that He was born on the day which is the shortest in our earthly reckoning and from which subsequent days begin to increase in length. He, therefore, who bent low and lifted us up chose the shortest day, yet the one whence light begins to increase.” Augustine, “For the Feast of Nativity” [Sermon 192], in *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*, Fathers of the Church 38, trans. Mary Sarah Muldowney (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1959), 34.

10. See the introduction for a discussion of the crucifixion dates in the Gospels.

11. A preliminary study of these dates was presented in Michael LeFebvre, “The Liturgical Function of Dates in the Pentateuch,” in *Exploring the Composition of the Pentateuch*, ed. L. S. Baker Jr., Kenneth Bergland, Felipe Masotti, and Rahel Schafer (forthcoming); cf. LeFebvre, “Reading Genesis One,” 7-21.

12. The first day is not explicitly mentioned, but the text is written from the perspective of the first day of the first month. In particular, the following verse (Ex 12:3) points to the 10th day of the month as still ahead.

13. Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 471-74, 476-78; R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, NAC 3B (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2000), 57, 165-69, 447-48.

14. August Dillman, *Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus* (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1880), 190-91; Bruno Bäntsch, *Exodus-Leviticus-Numeri* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1903), 170-72.

15. Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 342.

16. Cf. Sejin Park, *Pentecost and Sinai: The Festival of Weeks as a Celebration of the Sinai Event*, LHBOTS 342 (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 55; and Van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars*, 57.

17. Van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars*, 139; Smith and Bloch-Smith, *Pilgrimage*, 292. Cf. the similar but slightly different explanation offered by Park, who supposes that different factions may have disagreed over the proper date so that vagueness was a conciliatory effort among disagreements (*Pentecost and Sinai*, 55). However, Park goes on to recognize that a lunar calendar may have led to changing dates for this feast, and thus the same principle applies even where the variable dates for the feast may not be due to conflict.

18. See esp. the extensive treatment of this question by Park, *Pentecost and Sinai*. See also Van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars*, 139-44; James C. VanderKam, "Covenant and Pentecost," *CTJ 37* (2002). Cf. Ronald Hendel, "Sacrifice as a Cultural System: The Ritual Symbolism of Exodus 24:3–8," *ZAW* 101, no. 3 (1989): 373; Moshe Weinfeld, "The Uniqueness of the Decalogue and Its Place in Jewish Tradition," in *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition*, ed. Ben-Tsiyon Segal, trans. Gershon Levi (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1987), 21-27; Smith and Bloch-Smith, *Pilgrimage Pattern*, 62-65.

19. Note also the establishment (or renewal) of God's covenanted role as King over Israel in Deuteronomy's reflection on this date: "The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; . . . when Moses commanded us a law, as a possession for the assembly of Jacob. Thus the LORD became king in Jeshurun" (Deut 33:2-5; cf. Ex 19:5-6).

20. "There can be little doubt that the Feast of Weeks is implied." Park, *Pentecost and Sinai*, 59-61; 52n21. In fact, "Given the similarity between the terms 'weeks' and 'oaths' (the plurals are identical in the consonantal Hebrew text), it seems likely there is a play on words . . . [associated with] a covenant renewal during a Festival of 'Oaths' in the third month." Park, *Pentecost and Sinai*, 242.

21. The book of Exodus already includes the seventh-month festival in its lists of required pilgrimage feasts (Ex 23:14-17; 34:18-24). But Exodus repeatedly refers to the seventh-month feast by its agricultural name (Feast of Ingathering) rather than its narrative-focused name (Feast of Booths). The narratival title "Feast of Booths" is first given in Leviticus 23:34, when its association with God's care along the journey through the wilderness is mentioned (albeit anachronistically, since Leviticus is also located at Sinai prior to the final journey to the land).

22. Notably, 1 Kgs 6:1 gives the Feast of Booths as the date for the establishment of Solomon's temple on Mount Zion. Karl Weyde, *The Appointed Festivals of YHWH: The Festival Calendar in Leviticus 23 and the Sukkot Festival in Other Biblical Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 155-56; Frisch, "Exodus Motif," 5-6.)

23. Smith and Block-Smith, *Pilgrimage Pattern*, 307n46.

24. Discounting the four New Year's Day events previously discussed, since New Year's Day was itself a new moon day also.

25. According to Van Goudoever, "The date in Dt 1,3 means liturgically: the time of preparation of the next Passover." Van Goudoever, "Date in Dt 1,3," 145. If he is correct, the same might apply to Aaron's death two months before Booths.

26. As previously noted, the death of Miriam had particular significance in Numbers as indicating the transition between generations. Hence, her death's memorial is befitting a New Year's Day.

27. In this book, my focus is on the Pentateuch (i.e., the law where calendars are appointed). However, it would be interesting to explore the use of dates elsewhere in the Scriptures for possible parallels.

For example, commentators frequently note what appears to be a discrepancy in the flow of time between the decree of Haman and the decree of Mordecai in the story of Esther. Haman's wicked decree was issued on the thirteenth day of the first month (Esther 3:12). Notably, that date would be the eve before Passover. Thus, the decree to annihilate the people of God was published on the eve before the people's remembering how God had once before spared them from such an edict for their annihilation (in Egypt). According to the timing traced out in the subsequent chapters, Mordecai publicly cried out the day (or day after?) the wicked edict was announced (4:1-3). Esther then joined Mordecai's grieving, calling for a citywide fast among the Jews for three days (4:16). Then, "on the third day" (5:1), Esther went to the king, inviting him to a banquet that very day (5:4) and to another banquet the next day (5:8). On the day of that second banquet, Haman was exposed and executed (7:10), and "on that day" (8:1) Esther appealed to the king for a new edict to be written to reverse that of Haman. The king approved, and "at that time" (8:9) Mordecai summoned the scribes and published his new edict. The flow of the story presents the events as happening within the space of a week. Yet the date given for the publication of Mordecai's decree is "the third month . . . , on the twenty-third day" (8:9). This date is exactly seventy days after Haman's edict. Thus, the edict of rest follows a full cycle of days (ten times seven days) after the edict of death. This may be another instance in which dates are being used theologically rather than journalistically. Further examination of the use of dates elsewhere in the Old Testament narratives is warranted. On the use of timing sequences in the New Testament, see Douglas Estes, *The Temporal Mechanics of the Fourth Gospel: A Theory of Hermeneutical Relativity in the Gospel of John*, BibInt 92 (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

28. Steven W. Holloway, "What Ship Goes There? The Flood Narratives in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis Considered in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Temple Ideology," *ZAW* 103 (1991): 328-54; C. T. R. Hayward, "Sirach and Wisdom's Dwelling Place," in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Wisdom in the Bible, the Church, and the Contemporary World*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 37; Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (South Hamilton, MA: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1989), 105; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 104; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-creation, Re-creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 137-40.

29. Van Goudoever, "Date in Dt 1,3," 145; cf. Van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars*, 54-61.

Chapter 5: Dates for Remembering

1. Hostilities were ended with this armistice, and then the final terms of surrender were resolved in the Treaty of Versailles, signed on January 10, 1920.

2. Augustine, "For the Feast of Nativity" [Sermon 192], in *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*, Fathers of the Church 38, trans. Mary Sarah Muldowney (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1959), 34. (See chapter 4, footnote 9.)

3. Sheryl Julian, "History Is Served: Plimoth Plantation Restages the Original Thanksgiving Feast," *Chicago Tribune* (November 20, 1996).

4. Jan van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 56.

5. "Until the late 20th century . . . , the hegemony of a modernistic hermeneutics of suspicion promoted dismembering the text rather than attempting to understand its alternative temporalities. . . . [But now] there is a growing unease with an absolute chronology, and a rediscovery of the elusive nature of the [use of chronology in the] text." Douglas Estes, *The Temporal Mechanics of the Fourth Gospel: A Theory of Hermeneutical Relativity in the Gospel of John*, BIS 92 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 146-47.)

6. Jonathan Ben-Dov, "Calendars and Festivals," *OEBL* 1:88.

7. See the section "Schematic Calendars and the Pentateuch" in the next chapter.

8. Jeffrey Stackert, "Why Does the Plague of Darkness Last for Three Days? Source Ascription and Literary Motif in Exodus 10:21–23, 27," *VT* 61 (2011): 674-75; David M. Howard Jr., "'Three Days' in Joshua 1–3: Resolving a Chronological Conundrum," *JETS* 41, no. 4 (1998): 539-50.

9. E.g., John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 40, suggests the sacrifice location three-days journey from Egypt was someplace other than Israel's final destination of Sinai (but see Ex 3:12); Benno Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus*, trans. Walter Jacob, trans. (Hoboken, NJ: Kravets Publishing House, 1992), 125; W. H. Gispen, *Exodus*, Bible Student's Commentary, trans. Ed van Derr Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 57.

10. "The main cause of trouble appears to be the date of the erection of the Tabernacle." Van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars*, 56.

11. In the 1940s, H. G. Baldwin spent five years constructing a full-sized replica of the tabernacle. (Scott Taylor Hartzell, "Man's 1948 Creation Followed Divine Plan," *St. Petersburg Times*, May 9, 2001.)

12. A typical day's journey for a traveler was probably twelve to fifteen miles, and moving a massive host was likely a fair bit slower than that. R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, NAC 3B (Nashville: B&H

Publishing, 2000), 197; cf. Num 11:31.

13. Ex 12:29-32 describes the Angel of Death striking at "midnight," with Pharaoh's eviction notice following thereafter during the "night." However, Deut 16:6 urges Israel to remember the departure in connection with their offering of the Passover sacrifice at sunset, saying that Israel left at sunset. "You shall offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, at the time you came out of Egypt." These timing "discrepancies" further illustrate the capacity of the text, not only to vary the date assignment but also the time-of-day assignments, in order to provide observance instructions.

14. The phrase literally means, "on the bone of this day." This idiom appears twelve times in the Bible (Gen 7:13; 17:23, 26; Ex 12:17, 41, 51; Lev 23:21, 28; Deut 32:48; Josh 5:11; Ezek 24:2; 40:1). In each case, it indicates a sense of amazement that so many events take place within the framework (the "bones" as the unifying structure) of the very same day. In Genesis 7:13, it is said to be remarkable that Noah, his family, and all the animals entered the ark, and that the waters broke loose, all within the same day. In Genesis 17:23 and 26, it is remarkable that within the selfsame day both Abraham and all his household—indeed ninety-nine-year-old Abraham and thirteen-year-old Ishmael—were circumcised. On the Feast of Weeks day (Lev 23:21) and on the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:28), it is essential that the people set aside their labors to worship on the selfsame day that the priest is presenting offerings to the Lord. In Deuteronomy 32:48, we are told that the Lord called Moses up the mountain to die on the very same day as when Moses delivered his speech to Israel. In Joshua 5:11, it is reported that within the same day the people completed their first Passover in Canaan, they began to eat the produce of the land, and the manna ceased. In Ezekiel 24:2, the prophet is commanded to write down the events of the day on the very same day on which they occurred. And in Ezekiel 40:1, it is remarkable that the prophet who woke up among the Babylonian exiles in the morning found himself, within that very same day, reaching the city of Jerusalem in a same-day delivery by God's Spirit. The Hebrew idiom "in the bone of the day" (*bəʿeṣem hayyôm hazzeh*) is used to describe the connectedness of many parts within a single day. It should be translated, "within the space of the same day" or "this selfsame day." Cf. BDB 2:783.

15. Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 98.

16. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Humanitarian Bulletin: Myanmar* 2 (2017): 1.

17. According to Van Goudoever, "The date in Dt 1,3 means liturgically: the time of preparation of the next Passover." Van Goudoever, "The Date in Dt 1,3," 145.

18. Van Goudoever, "The Date in Dt 1,3," 148.

19. James Robson, "The Literary Composition of Deuteronomy," in *Interpreting Deuteronomy: Issues and Approaches*, ed. David G. Firth and Philip S. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 22; cf. Van Goudoever, "The Date in Dt 1,3," 145.

Chapter 6: Dates Assigned by Law

1. Veterans Day was moved to the fourth Monday in October by this legislation, but in 1978 it was returned to November 11, being the date of the armistice to end World War I.

2. Martin Luther King Jr. Day was not instituted as a national holiday until 1983. But it was added into the list of fixed Monday holidays (being the third Monday of January) when it was established.

3. In fact, to record both an actual date and the authorized observance date might fuel religious schism, as occurred when King Jeroboam devised a basis to call into question the authorized festival of the seventh month with an alternate in the eighth month (1 Kgs 12:32-33).

4. Cf. the section on legal speech acts later in this chapter.

5. E.g., Deut 17:18; 31:9; Josh 1:8; 2 Kgs 17:13; 1 Chron 16:40; 22:12; Ezra 7:6; Ps 1:2; 78:5; 119:1-176; Mal 4:4.

6. For example, one textbook states concerning Genesis: "The function of the history contained in Genesis is to provide a prologue and foundation of the founding of the nation of Israel and the giving of the law in the book of Exodus." Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 50; cf. Frank Crüsemann, *The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law*, trans. Allan Mahnke (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 10; and Samuel Greengus, "Law," *ABD* 4:250.

7. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "I Will Remember the Deeds of the Lord: The Meaning of Narrative," in *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 69-84.

8. Note, in particular, the text's introduction of the messianic anticipation behind the animal sacrifices appointed for Mount Zion: "It is said to this day, 'On the mount of the LORD it [or he, the new Isaac] shall be provided.'" Cf. Is 53:1-12; Ps 40:6-8; Heb 10:5-10. See Michael LeFebvre, *Leviticus: A 12-Week Study* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 15.

9. Friedemann W. Golka, "The Aetiologies in the Old Testament: Part 1," *VT* 26, no. 4 (1976): 410-28; Friedemann W. Golka, "The Aetiologies in the Old Testament: Part 2," *VT* 27, no. 1 (1977): 36–47; Jon D. Levenson, "The Theologies of Commandment in Biblical Israel," *HTR* 73 (1980): 17-33.

10. Calum Carmichael, *The Laws of Deuteronomy* (London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 61-62; cf. Bernard Jackson, *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law*, JSOTSup 314 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 227-30.

11. Bernard Jackson, *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law*, JSOTSup 314 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 225-27.

12. Jonathan P. Burnside, “Exodus and Asylum: Uncovering the Relationship Between Biblical Law and Narrative,” *JSOT* 34, no. 3 (2010): 243-66.

13. Jonathan P. Burnsides, *God, Justice, and Society: Aspects of Law and Legality in the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), xiii.

14. Sacha Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity: Empires, States, and Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 84-88; Lis Brack-Bernsen, “The 360-Day Year in Mesopotamia,” in *Calendars and Years: Astronomy and Time in the Ancient Near East*, ed. John Steele (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007), 83-100; John P. Britton, “Calendars, Intercalations and Year-Lengths in Mesopotamian Astronomy,” in Steele, *Calendars and Years*, 117-19; John M. Steele, “Making Sense of Time: Observational and Theoretical Calendars,” in *Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, ed. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 470-85; Robert K. Englund, “Administrative Timekeeping in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 31, no. 2 (1988): 121-85; Paul-Alain Beaulieu, “The Impact of Month-Lengths on the Neo-Babylonian Cultic Calendar,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 83 (1993); David Brown, *Mesopotamian Planetary Astronomy-Astrology* (Groningen: Styx, 2000), 146-53; Lis Brack-Bernsen and Hermann Hunger, “TU 11: A Collection of Rules for the Prediction of Lunar Phases and of Month Lengths,” *Sources and Commentaries in the Exact Sciences* 3 (2003).

15. Brack-Bernsen, “360-Day Year,” 83.

16. Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity*, 87. Cf. Robert K. Englund, “Administrative Timekeeping,” 129-30.

17. The modern use of the schematic calendar is called the bank interest method, and it is controversial since it generally results in a higher yield for the bank than apparent to the borrower. *ISDA 2006 Definitions* (New York: ISDA, 2006), §4.16; Allan W. Vestal, “No Longer Bending to the Purposes of the Money Lenders: Prohibiting the ‘Bank Method’ of Interest Calculation,” *North Carolina Law Review* 70 (1991): 243-85.

18. Jonathan Ben-Dov, “Calendars and Festivals,” *OEBL*, 1:88. Cf. Jonathan Ben-Dov, “A 360-Day Administrative Year in Ancient Israel: Judahite Desk Calendars and the Flood Account,” in *What Difference Does Time Make?*, ed. Joann Scurlock and Richard Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming); Frederick H. Cryer, “The Interrelationships of Gen 5,32; 11,10–11 and the Chronology of the Flood (Gen 6–9),” *Biblica* 66, no. 2 (1985): 241-61.

19. Ben-Dov, “Administrative Year in Ancient Israel.”

20. Brack-Bernsen, “360-Day Year,” 83.

21. Cf. the discussion of the flood narrative dates as an incontrovertible example of a schematic calendar employed in narrative in “Flood Dates” in chapter 5.

22. Ben-Dov, “Calendars and Festivals,” 1:88; cf. Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity*, 87.

23. We can document only the thirty-day design of the schematic month with confidence, but it is also possible that the schematic month anticipated sabbaths on the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of the “ideal” month even though the actual sabbaths may fall on different dates. In the festival calendar in Lev 23:1-44 for example, several festivals seem to expect sabbaths on the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days. Passover occurs on the fourteenth day, perhaps a full-moon sabbath evening (v. 5). The sabbath commandment in Deut 5:12-17 presumes Passover (the fourteenth of the month) was also a sabbath day. The day after Passover (the fifteenth) was an extra “holy convocation” day (v. 6) to begin the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That continued seven days with “a holy convocation” on the seventh day (v. 8) of that feast. That would be the

twenty-first day of the month, perhaps indicating that the final "holy convocation" was held on the next regular sabbath. The Feast of Firstfruits (which I have elsewhere argued took place on the fifteenth day of that month; see the excursus "The Date of Firstfruits" in chapter 3) is called "the day after the Sabbath" (v. 11), suggesting that the fourteenth was always (at least in the schematic calendar) a sabbath. The Feast of Trumpets was held on the first day of the seventh month, which was already a new moon festival. Thus, the holy convocation called on that day would have coincided with the regular new moon day of rest. The Day of Atonement is assigned to the tenth day of its month, perhaps indicating a date midway between the seventh- and fourteenth-day sabbaths. Since this was to be a day of fasting, it would not be suitable for observance on an actual sabbath day. The tenth day might mean "a day between the first and second sabbaths" of the month, whatever the actual dates of those sabbaths might be. The Feast of Booths in the seventh month began with "a holy convocation" on the fifteenth day (vv. 34-35), presumably the day after the mid-month sabbath. It lasted seven days until the twenty-first of the month, with an additional holy convocation on the eighth day after the festival began. This may indicate that the Feast of Booths began (the fourteenth and fifteenth) and ended (the twenty-first and twenty-second) with a pair of framing double rest-days. In other words, although it cannot be proven, it is plausible that the Hebrew "ideal" month used in its legal texts anticipated the typical, schematic thirty days as well as sabbaths on the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days. The actual sabbath dates would be determined either by counting from week-to-week across the months or by lunar sightings (see "The Week" in chapter 2, for further discussion of the lunar week thesis). If this is correct, it would mean that the priests and the king would have to schedule the actual festival dates each year based on the indicated pattern given by these schematic (but not actual) day numbers of various festival observances.

24. Edward Levenston, "The Speech-Acts of God," *Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts* 12 (1984): 140; Bernard Jackson, "Speech Acts and Speech Behavior," in *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law*, JSOTSup 314 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 42-69; Eric Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice: From Its Shadow in Homer to Its Substance in Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 41-45.

25. Gordon Hugenberger, *Marriage as Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics Developed from Malachi* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 216-39; Raymond Westbrook and Bruce Wells, *Everyday Law in Biblical Israel: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 55-65; Reuven Yaron, "Aramaic Marriage Contracts from Elephantine," *JSS* 3, no. 1 (1958): 1-39.

26. Westbrook and Wells, *Everyday Law*, 55-66; Ze'ev Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times: An Introduction* (Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1964), 134-57; Samuel Feigin, "Some Cases of Adoption in Israel," *JBL* 50, no. 3 (1931): 186-200; Nathanael Warren, "Adoption-Alienation in Ez 47,22.23 and in the Ancient Near East," *ZAW* 126, no. 3 (2014): 421-24; Meir Malul, "Adoption of Foundlings in the Bible and Mesopotamian Documents: A Study of Some Legal Metaphors in Ezekiel 16:1–7," *JSOT* 46 (1990): 111-12, 125nn105, 107; Michael LeFebvre and Basheer Abdulfadi, "A Further Look at Translating 'Son of God,'" *IJFM* 29, no. 2 (2012): 61-74; cf. Donald McKim,"Covenant," in *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 64. On adoption in the ancient Near East in general, see Martin David, *Die Adoption im altbabylonischen Recht* (Leipzig: T. Weicher, 1927).

27. Note that it is this same biblical principle of legal speech acts that lies behind the proclamation of justification, whereby sinners are truly made to be holy in their status before God.

28. This count is based on the MT: Pss 3 (2 Sam 15-17); 7 (1 Sam 23:25?); 18 (2 Sam 22); 30 (2 Sam 2:3-4); 34 (1 Sam 21:12-15); 51 (2 Sam 11–12); 52 (1 Sam 22:9-19); 54 (1 Sam 23:19); 56

(1 Sam 21:10-11); 57 (1 Sam 22:1; 24:3); 59 (1 Sam 19:11); 60 (2 Sam 8:1-14); 63 (1 Sam 22:5; 23:14-15; 2 Sam 15–17); 142 (1 Sam 22:1; 24:3). Cf. also 2 Sam 22:1.

29. First Samuel identifies the king of Gath by his name, Achish; the psalm identifies him by one of the traditional titles of Philistine kings, Abimelech (cf. Gen 21:32; 26:8), which means, "My father is king." This title refers to the common ancient ideal of a human king who serves as the son (the authoritative representative) of the nation's deity.

30. The preposition *beth* is here used with the Piel infinitive, indicating "the time when" this action occurred. "ב" BDB, 91.

31. Brevard Childs, "Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis," *JSS* 16, no. 2 (1971): 137-50.

32. On the role of the psalms as the songs of David and his heirs (ultimately the Messiah), see Michael LeFebvre, "The Hymns of Christ: The Old Testament Formation of the New Testament Hymnal," in *Sing a New Song: Recovering Psalm Singing for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Anthony T. Selvaggio (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 92-110; Michael LeFebvre, *Singing the Songs of Jesus: Revisiting the Psalms* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010).

33. It may have been after he became king, when 1 Chronicles tells us he initiated a program to compose hymns for the temple Solomon would build (1 Chron 25:1).

34. Originally published in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1843.

35. See Raymond Westbrook, *Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Law*, Cahiers de la Revue Biblique 26 (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1988); Shalom M. Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant in Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law*, VTSup 18 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006); Bernard S. Jackson, *Wisdom-Laws: A Study of the* Mishpatim *of* Exodus *21:1–22:16* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3-39; Joshua A. Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Convention and the Limits of Source Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Michael LeFebvre, *Collections, Codes, and Torah: The Re-characterization of Israel's Written Law*, LHBOTS 451 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

36. See David Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah*.

37. See references for these alternatives in footnotes 9–11 in the introduction.

38. Philippe Guillaume, *Land and Calendar: The Priestly Document from Genesis 1 to Joshua 18*, LHBOTS 391 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 47.

Chapter 7: The Creation Week as Calendar Narrative

1. C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 44.

2. The fourth commandment in Jewish, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant numbering is the third commandment in Roman Catholic and Lutheran traditions. On the Deuteronomy version of the sabbath commandment, see "The Christian Sabbath" in chapter 12.

3. E.g., Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Corvina, CA: Reasons to Believe, 2015).

4. Genesis 1:5 is an exception, where *day* refers strictly to the daylight half of a twenty-four-hour period, in contrast with *night*.

5. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1987), 19.

6. John Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1996), 111.

7. More or less. The gravitational synergy between the moon and the earth are gradually slowing the Earth's rotation. Scientists calculate that, because of this dynamic, days were significantly shorter than twenty-four-hours in the distant past. But I use the calculation 24 x 7 = 168 to make the point of a normal week. See Linda T. Elkins-Tanton, *The Earth and the Moon*, The Solar System (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010), 216-39.

8. Jacob L. Wright, "Warfare and Wanton Destruction: A Reexamination of Deuteronomy 20:19–20 in Relation to Ancient Siegecraft," *JBL* 127, no. 3 (2008): 434.

9. E.g., Herbert C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1942), 1:66.

10. Contra Henry Morris: "True creation necessarily involves the theory of a 'creation of apparent age'. . . . The plants did not develop from seeds; rather the herb was formed 'yielding seed.' Similarly, the fruit trees were 'yielding fruit,' not requiring several years of preliminary growth as do modern fruit trees." Henry Morris, *The New Defender's Study Bible* (Winona Lake, IN: World Publishing, 2006), 10; cf. John C. Whitcomb Jr. and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Philadelphia: P&R Publishing, 1961), 232-39, 344-46, 356-57; but qualified by Ken Ham, *Six Days: The Age of the Earth and the Decline of the Church* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2013), 103.

11. Origen, *De Principiis* 4.16, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to* A.D. *325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. Frederick Crombie

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 4:365. Cf. G. W. Butterworth, *Origen on First Principles* (London: SPCK, 1936), 288; and Robert Letham, "'In the Space of Six Days': The Days of Creation from Origen to the Westminster Assembly," *WTJ* 61 (1999): 149-74.

12. Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 125.

13. Walter Vogels, "The Cultic and Civil Calendars of the Fourth Day of Creation (Gen 1,14b)," *SJOT* 11, no. 2 (1997): 168.

14. My conclusion might be regarded as a variation of the so-called Framework Hypothesis, although proponents of that view rely on the internal features of the creation week and have not, to date, recognized the broader Pentateuchal pattern of dated narratives I have sought to demonstrate.

15. But note the playful interpretation of the Babylonian Talmud: "The day contains twelve hours. The first three hours the Holy One, blessed by He, sits and studies the Law. The second three hours He sits and judges the whole world. When He sees that the world deserves destruction, He stands up from the throne of judgment, and sits on the throne of mercy. The third three hours He sits and feeds all the world, from the horns of the unicorn to the eggs of the vermin. In the fourth three hours He sits and plays with leviathan, for it is said 'The leviathan, whom thou hast formed to play therein' (Ps. civ. 26). Rabbi Eliezer says 'The night has three watches, and at every watch the Holy One, blessed be He, sits and roars like a lion; for it is said, 'The Lord shall roar from on high and utter His voice from His holy habitation; He shall mightily roar upon His habitation' (Jer. xxv. 30)." Joseph Barclay, *The Talmud* (London: John Murray, 1878), 34-35. While not a serious attempt to describe God's actual schedule, this talmudic depiction illustrates the long tradition of reading the creation week as presenting God in the form of a model within the human work schedule.

16. Anne Knafl, *Forming God: Divine Anthropomorphism in the Pentateuch*, Siphrut 12 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014); Esther Hamori, *"When Gods Were Men": The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature*, BZAW 384 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008); Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

17. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 17.

18. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III: 101–150*, AB 17A (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 202; Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 143.

19. Robert Gordon, "The Week That Made the World: Reflections on the First Pages of the Bible," in *Reading the Law: Studies in Honour of Gordon J. Wenham*, LHBOTS 461, ed. J. G. McConville and Karl Möller (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 229.

20. Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1:556.

21. Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: JPS, 5790/1990), 459-60; Baruch Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, AB 4A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 89.

22. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 2:1532.

23. On the dome over the earth, see "Day Two: Heavens" in chapter 9.

24. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, Calvin's Commentaries, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 1:86-87. Cf. Francis Watson, "Genesis Before Darwin:

Why Scripture Needed Liberating from Science," in *Reading Genesis After Darwin*, ed. Stephen C. Barton and David Wilkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25-28; and Robert Godfrey, "Calvin on Creation: From His Commentary on Genesis 1," in *God's Pattern for Creation: A Covenantal Reading of Genesis 1* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 97-105. For a similar view as Calvin's, but from the perspective of a Christian scientist, see Charlotte Methuen, "From *Sola Scriptura* to *Astronomia Nova:* Authority, Accommodation and the Reform of Astronomy in the Work of Johannes Kepler," in *Science and Theology in the Reformation: Studies in Interpretations of Astronomical Observation in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 77-93.

25. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Calvin's Commentaries, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 6:2.184-85.

26. Galileo argued the same point in his "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina of Tuscany" (1615): "Hence I think that I may reasonably conclude that whenever the Bible has occasion to speak of any physical conclusion (especially those which are very abstruse and hard to understand), the rule has been observed of avoiding confusion in the minds of the common people which would render them contumacious toward the higher mysteries." *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, trans. Stillman Drake (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), 182; cf. Vern S. Poythress, "Correlations with Providence in Genesis 1," *WTJ* 77 (2015), 71; and John Day, *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1–11* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 2-5.

27. Cf. B. B. Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Creation," *Princeton Theological Review* 13 (1915): 190-255; Keith C. Sewell, "Calvin and the Stars, Kuyper and the Fossils: Some Historiographical Reflections," *Pro Rege* (September 2003): 10-22; and Richard Holdeman, "Was John Calvin a Theistic Evolutionist? Calvin's View of Creation" (unpublished paper, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, 2001).

28. Walton, *Lost World of Genesis One*, 132.

29. Deborah B. Haarsma and Loren D. Haarsma, *Origins: Christian Perspectives on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2011), 289-97.

30. Galileo Galilei, quoting an unnamed churchman, in, "Letter to the Grand Duchess," 186.

31. By "scientific voice," I mean scientific or pseudoscientific arguments that are often at odds with the consensus of the leading institutions of modern science. Claims of this nature often cite the authority of science (as an ideal) yet defy science (as an institution).

32. Jie Fowler et al., "Deception in Cosmetics Advertising: Examining Cosmetics Advertising Claims in Fashion Magazine Ads," *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing* 6, no. 3 (2015): 194-206.

33. "Deepak is the very definition of what we mean by pseudoscience," according to Michael Shermer in an ABC News interview about him. Dan Harris and Ely Brown, "*Nightline* 'Face-Off': Does God Have a Future?," March 23, 2010, http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/FaceOff/nightline-face-off-god-future/story?id=10170505.

34. E.g., T. O. Shanavas, *Islamic Theory of Evolution: The Missing Link Between Darwin and the Origin of Species* (n.p.: Brainbow Press, 2010), 43-59; cf. Zakir Naik, *The Qur'an and Modern Science: Compatible or Incompatible?* (Lexington, KY: CreateSpace, 2018).

35. A promotional poster of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Indiana shown to me by an Ahmadi friend.

36. A promotional poster of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Indiana (shown to me by an Ahmadi friend).

37. Michael LeFebvre, *Collections, Codes, and Torah: The Re-characterization of Israel's Written Law*, LHBOTS 451 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 183-240.

38. Jacob Shavit, *Athens in Jerusalem: Classical Antiquity and Hellenism in the Making of the Modern Secular Jew*, trans. C. Naor and N. Werner (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1997), 436.

39. Henry Morris, introduction to *New Defender's Study Bible*, iv.

40. Hal Lindsey, *Israel and the Last Days* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1983), 32-33.

41. Hal Lindsey, *There's A New World Coming: A Prophetic Odyssey* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1973), 8.

42. R. E. Clements, *Leviticus*, Broadman Bible Commentary 2 (London: Marshal, Morgan and Scott, 1971), 34; William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 177-80; R. Laird Harris, "Leviticus," in *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, Expositor's Bible Dictionary 2, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 572; Elmer A. Josephson, *God's Keys to Health and Happiness* (Wichita, KS: Bible Light Publications, 1972).

43. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 167-68.

44. Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in the Light of History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 2-3.

45. L. Michael Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*, Biblical Tools and Studies 15 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 92.

46. For a list of the literary devices indicating emphasis on the seventh day, see Morales, *Tabernacle Pre-figured*, 92-94.

47. For a discussion of historical readings of the Genesis creation week, see "Historical Views on Genesis 1" in chapter 12.

48. Godfrey, *Pattern in Creation*, 59.

49. Ken Ham, *The Lie: Evolution/Millions of Years* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2013), 13.

50. Ham, *Lie*, 184.

51. Ross, *Matter of Days*.

52. Ross, *Matter of Days*, 73-75, 83-86, 242.

53. Haarsma and Haarsma, *Origins*.

54. See "Wonder and Worship," chapter 14 in Haarsma and Haarsma, *Origins*, 289-97.

55. Haarsma and Haarsma, *Origins*, 110.

56. J. P. Moreland et al., eds., *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

57. Moreland et al., *Theistic Evolution*, 816.

Chapter 8: The Plot of the Creation Week

1. E.g., Lev 23:11, 16, 24, 32, 38, 39.

2. Hendrick L. Bosman, "Sabbath," *NIDOTTE* 4:1157-62. Note also the special phrase "sabbath of sabbathing" (*šabbāt šabbātôn*; Lev 23:3, 32), typically translated as "Sabbath of solemn rest."

3. "Ancient Cosmology Is Function Oriented," as John Walton explains in *Lost World of Genesis One*, 20-35.

4. Contra Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Corvina, CA: Reasons to Believe, 2015), 249.

5. Iain Provan, *Discovering Genesis: Content, Interpretation, Reception* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 62; A. H. Konkel, "בֹּהוּ (983)," *NIDOTTE* 1:606-9. "*Bōhû* occurs 3x [in the Old Testament], always in connection with *tōhû*." Konkel, "בֹּהוּ (983)," 1:606.

6. Note the importance of animals and humankind all obtaining and enjoying their food as they abide in their appointed realms in the creation meditation in Psalm 104.

7. John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 162-65.

8. Walton is correct when he insists that the focus of the Genesis 1 narrative is on the ordering of functions and not material origins. However, if he really intends that Genesis 1 has no interest in material origins, he overstates the case. The text clearly infers the notion of God as the originator of all cosmic stuff as well as its ordainer. But the former is inferred and largely in the background, while the latter is the burden of the text. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 92-100.

9. Hermann Gunkel reintroduced the appreciation of this pattern into modern scholarship, himself drawing on older commentators. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, HAT 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1917), 118; cf. J. G. von Herder, *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts* (Tübingen: J. G. Cotta, 1806), 1:129-30.) For a broader discussion of historic efforts to discern the structure of the creation week, see William P. Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greet Texts of Genesis 1:1–2:3*, SBL Dissertation Series 132 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

10. Walton, *Lost World of Genesis One*, 21-70.

11. John Walton has argued that Genesis 1:1–2:3 should be read as a temple inauguration narrative based on parallels with other ancient Near Eastern temple construction narratives. According to Walton, "the seven days are not given as the period of time over which the material cosmos came into existence, but the period of time devoted to the inauguration of the functions of the cosmic temple, and perhaps its annual reenactment." Walton, *Lost World of Genesis One*, 91; Walton, *Genesis 1 as*

Ancient Cosmology, 181-84; cf. 1 Kgs 8:65; 2 Chron 7:9. Walton's insights are significant and have been helpful to me and many of his readers. However, instead of regarding the seven days as an annual ritual in the temple (for which there is no evidence), I would argue the seven days are the weekly "ritual" of the lay Israelite's labor and rest. Recognizing the explicit theme of fruitfulness in the text helps to indicate its address to weekly labors in the land rather than an occasional seven-day ritual in the temple. This reading fits better with the fourth commandment's interpretation of the creation week as guidance for the lay Israelite in his or her weekly labor and rest.

12. The Hebrew word *ʾĕlōhîm* is the plural form of *ʾĕlōah* (or its shortened form, *ʾel*). The term describes a being of divine power, usually a divine being (a god) but sometimes a king or judge possessing delegated divine authority (e.g., Ps 58:1). When used in its plural form, it can refer to a plurality of divine beings (e.g., Gen 31:30; Ex 20:3) or, as in its frequent use for Yahweh in the Old Testament, it can refer to the single God who possesses all power in himself where "the pl. has reference to intensification or absolutization or exclusivity." Terence E. Fretheim, "אֱלֹהִים (466)," *NIDOTTE* 1:405-6.

13. Compare, in particular, how God's verbal creation of humankind in Genesis 1:26-27 is retold as involving "manual" creation in Genesis 2:7, 21-22.

14. Thus the emphasis on God's creation *by wisdom* in Proverbs 8:22-31. Cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-creation, Re-creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 45-52.

15. Note that Adam fell in connection with his desire for wisdom independent of God (Gen 3:6).

16. Philippe Guillaume, *Land and Calendar: The Priestly Document from Genesis 1 to Joshua 18*, LHBOTS 391 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 47. Walter Vogels also made this observation in "The Cultic and Civil Calendars of the Fourth Day of Creation (Gen 1,14b)," *SJOT* 11, no. 2 (1997): 176.

Chapter 9: Ordered for Fruitfulness (Days 1–3)

1. For a catalogue of views on the chapter's opening verses: Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 11.

2. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 46; Bruce K. Waltke, *Creation and Chaos* (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974), 25-28; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-creation, Re-creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 30-35.

3. C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 55.

4. The need to start with a "blank slate" is itself anachronistic. When a modern-day writer wants to start a new document, she draws a blank sheet of paper from the desk (or opens a blank page on the computer) and begins. Within the highly developed modern world, it is easy to think about beginning a project with a blank slate. In the ancient world, however, to write a document meant slaughtering a calf, treating its skin, obtaining the elements to mix inks, and only then composing a written document. Period common sense—that is, the general experience of people in that day—always started with raw materials that had to be formed into something useful. In fact, ancient number systems did not have a zero. People did not think of nothing (zero) as the starting point for counting but rather began counting at one. Robert Kaplan, *The Nothing That Is: A Natural History of Zero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

5. Walton, *Lost World of Genesis One*, 46-52; John Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1996), 61-66.

6. The phrase "Spirit [*rûaḥ*] of God was hovering [*rāḥap*]" has sometimes been translated, "wind from God was blowing," or "mighty wind sweeping over." Harry M. Orlinsky, "The Plain Meaning of Ruªḥ in Gen. 1.2," *JQR* 48, no. 2 (1957): 174-82; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 5. The Hebrew word *rûaḥ* could be understood as "wind" rather than "spirit," but it is awkward to describe its blowing as "hovering" (*rāḥap*) rather than using the typical idiom for wind "passing over" (*ʿābar*). Furthermore, the subsequent context focuses on divine speech from the *rûaḥ* making things good; there is no express reference to divine blowing in the subsequent narrative (cf. Gen 2:7; 8:1). It is best to understand the verse as referring to God's Spirit manifesting the divine presence over the watery world. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Volume I* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 343.

7. Fazale Rana, “Origin-of-Life Predictions Face Off: Evolution vs. Biblical Creation,” *RTB* 101 (March 31, 2001), http://reasons.org/explore/publications/rtb-101; cf. Jeff Zweerink, “Water Does Not Equate Habitability,” *Today’s New Reason to Believe* (blog) (September 3, 2015), http://reasons.org/explore/blogs/todays-new-reason-to-believe.

8. Henry Morris, *The New Defender’s Study Bible* (Winona Lake, IN: World Publishing, 2006), 8.

9. The typical character of the passage is important. The night shift is just as noble as daylight labors (Ps 134:1), but the week calendar employs the stereotype of daylight labor to present its lesson.

10. Andrew E. Steinmann, “אחד as an Ordinal Number and the Meaning of Genesis 1:5,” *JETS* 45, no. 4 (2002): 583.

11. ESV, HCSB, NASB, NET.

12. KJV (1611), Tyndale (1535), Geneva (1599), Douay-Rheims (1582), Bishops (1568); also the Latin Vulgate and the Greek LXX. Cf. a handful of modern translations, like NKJV and NRSV.

13. “Astonishing as it may seem to the modern mind, with very rare exceptions [i.e., a certain Chinese idea that emerged only around AD 200] the idea that the sky is not solid is a distinctively modern one. Historical evidence shows that virtually everyone in the ancient world believed in a solid firmament.” Paul H. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I: The Meaning of *raqiaʿ* in Gen 1:6–8,” *WTJ* 53 (1991): 236.

14. Seely, “Firmament and the Water Above, Part I,” 227-36; contra Franz Delitzsch, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 52-54.

15. For a recent example, see Randall W. Younker and Richard M. Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome: Another Look at the Hebrew רָקִיעַ (*rāqîaʿ*),” in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015), 31-56.

16. In fact, Christians today continue to speak in terms of this ancient worldview whenever we speak of God as being “up.” Is God literally located in a place over the earth, with his throne located “up” over the North Pole, over the South Pole, or over the Equator? When Jesus ascended into the clouds, did he then ascend further into outer space to a cosmological region beyond the clouds? Very few today would suppose that God is located in a specific, cosmic place (he is omnipresent) or that Jesus’ ascent was the necessary route to a destination in outer space (as imaginatively approximated in Mark Twain’s humorous “Captain Stormfield’s Visit to Heaven”). These are ways in which Christian language today continues to employ the Bible’s use of an ancient cosmological worldview without supposing it is a scientific description.

17. Luther’s description is more picturesque: “The heaven was made in this manner, that the unformed mass extended itself outward as the bladder of a pig extends itself outward in a circular form when it is inflated.” Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5,” in *Luther’s Works: Volume 1* (Jaroslav Pelikan, ed.; Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955),” 24.

18. Seely, “Firmament and the Water Above, Part I,” 237.

19. Morris, *New Defender’s Study Bible*, 9. Morris claims, “Although the exact extent and structure of this canopy is still being researched by computer simulations, there are no major scientific problems with the concept.” Cf. Larry Vardiman, “Temperature Profiles for an Optimized Water Vapor Canopy,” in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Creationism*, ed. R. L. Ivey (Pittsburgh: Creation Science Fellowship, 2003), 1-8.

20. Bodie Hodge, "The Collapse of the Canopy Model," September 25, 2009, http://answersingenesis.org/environmental-science/the-collapse-of-the-canopy-model/.

21. James Patrick Holding, "Is the *Raqiyaʿ* ('Firmament') a Solid Dome? Equivocal Language in the Cosmology of Genesis 1 and the Old Testament: A Response to Paul H. Seely," November 1, 1999, https://answersingenesis.org/astronomy/cosmology/is-the-raqiya-firmament-a-solid-dome/.

22. Paul H. Seely, "The Firmament and the Waters Above, Part II: The Meaning of 'The Waters Above the Firmament' in Gen 1:6–8," *WTJ* 54 (1992): 31-46. John Calvin endeavored to find an explanation for the *rāqîaʿ* that avoided the idea of a physical dome, but he realized there was no way to avoid the vision of an ocean of waters suspended overhead. He therefore concluded, "It appears opposed to common sense, and quite incredible, that there should be waters above the heaven. . . . This is a certain principle, that nothing is here treated of but the visible form of the world [i.e., the world as perceived by the original audience]. He who would learn astronomy, and other recondite arts, let him go elsewhere. Here the Spirit of God would teach all men without exception; and therefore . . . the history of the creation . . . is the book of [i.e., written to be within the grasp of] the unlearned." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis*, Calvin's Commentaries, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 79-80.

23. "The word *šamayim* (heaven[s]) is broader in meaning than *raqiaʿ*. It encompasses not only the *raqiaʿ* ([Gen 1] v. 8; Ps 19:6; 148:4) but the space above the *raqiaʿ* (Ps 2:4; 11:4; 139:8) as well as the space below (Ps 8:8; 79:2)." Seely, "Firmament and the Water Above, Part I," 237.

24. Translation and citation references are from Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 1, Ancient Christian Writers 41, trans. John Hammond Taylor (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 2.1.2.

25. Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 2.1.2.

26. Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 2.1.2.

27. Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 2.2.5.

28. Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 2.4.7.

29. Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 2.4.8.

30. Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 2.5.9.

31. Luther, "*Lectures on Genesis*," 27.

32. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, 1.31.

33. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, 1.31.

34. Luther, *Lectures in Genesis*, 1.26.

35. See "Creation Week as a Historically Situated Narrative," in chapter 7.

36. Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke*, ICC 30 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1977), 393 (emphasis original). Cf. Ferdinand Regalado, "The Jewish Background of the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus," *Asia Journal of Theology* 16, no. 2 (2002): 341-48.

37. Lester Grabbe, "The Jannes/Jambres Tradition in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Its Date," *JBL* 98, no. 3 (1979): 393-401.

38. The geography known to Genesis is provided in a "verbal map" in Genesis 10. That chapter describes the dispersion of nations throughout the known world after the Tower of Babel. There are seventy kingdoms described in Genesis 10. As evident from that map, the ancient Hebrews had not yet

learned of great oceans other than the Mediterranean Sea. See “Table of Nations (Map 1–2),” in *Crossway ESV Bible Atlas*, ed. John D. Currid and David P. Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 55; cf. Ezek 27 that traces the trade routes of Tyre, extending throughout the Mediterranean world.

39. Some ancient peoples believed that the earth’s landmass was surrounded by a single sea, encircling it like a ring. Some commentators hold that the gathering of the waters into “one place” in Genesis 1:9 refers to such a sea surrounding the earth. “Oceanus (geographical),” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1030. If that is correct, it is because the Great Sea (the Mediterranean) was regarded as part of that single circle of water. It is not clear from anything in Scripture, however, that Israel held to the idea of a circle of water surrounding the land, nor is it likely that a ring of water surrounding the whole earth would be called “one place.”

40. Contra Morris, *New Defender’s Bible*, 10”.

41. Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 125.

42. Cf. Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in the Light of History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 4, 48-49; John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013): 41-42; Seely, “Firmament and the Water Above, Part II,” 31-36.

43. See “Creation Week as Calendar Narrative” in chapter 7.

Chapter 10: Populated for Blessing (Days 4–6)

1. Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 9, 16.

2. Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 9, 66-72.

3. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Ancient Christian Writers 41, trans. John Hammond Taylor (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 1:154. See also Andrew Louth, "The Six Days of Creation According to the Greek Fathers," in *Reading Genesis After Darwin*, ed. Stephen C. Barton and David Wilkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 39-55. John Sailhamer has recently argued for an instantaneous creation similar to Augustine's view. John Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996), 131-32.

4. Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 67-69.

5. Origin, *De Principiis* 6.1.16, in *The Writings of Origen*, trans. Frederick Crombie (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869), 1:315-17.

6. Scot Chadwick, "Did God Really Create Plants Before the Sun?" *Answers in Depth*, September 22, 2017, https://answersingenesis.org/days-of-creation/did-god-really-create-plants-before-sun/; cf. James B. Jordan, *Creation in Six Days: A Defense of the Traditional Reading of Genesis One* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999), 189-90.

7. C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 58; cf. Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Corvina, CA: Reasons to Believe, 2015), 69-71. But v. 16 says that God "made [*ʿāśâ*]" the sun and moon and "set them in the expanse" on day four.

8. For a discussion of the timekeeping role of the sun and moon, see "The 'Clock' Behind Israel's Calendar" in chapter 1.

9. The only (almost) exception is Gen 4:7, where sin is personified as "crouching" and seeking to "master [*māšal*]" Cain. Ps 136:8 also repeats this ascription of ruling that God gave to the sun and the moon.

10. Gerald Hasel, "The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," *AUSS* 10 (1972): 1-20; Arvid Kapelrud, "The Mythological Features in Genesis Chapter 1 and the Author's Intentions," *VT* 24, no. 2 (1974): 178-86; John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 33-46.

11. Kent Harold Richards, “Bless/Blessing,” *ABD* 1:754.

12. John C. Whitcomb Jr. and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Philadelphia: P&R Publishing, 1961), 232-39, 344-46, 356-57.

13. Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, “בְּהֵמָה (989),” *NIDOTTE* 1:612.

14. In a later passage (Gen 3:1), the invasion by one of the “beasts of the field” (*ḥayyat haśśādeh*; cf. “beasts of the earth,” *ḥaytô-ʾereṣ*) into the orchard tended by Adam was the first hint of trouble in the garden.

15. Ronald E. Osborn, *Death Before the Fall: Biblical Literalism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014); Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

16. “The levitical theology builds off of the Gen cosmology in terms of the structure of the animal world. There is a significant degree of resemblance between the way God originally designed the world [Gen 1:20-25] and the way his chosen community should function in relation to that design [Lev 11:1-47].” Richard E. Averbeck, “Clean and Unclean,” *NIDOTTE* 4:483. “They [the Levitical dietary categories] are part of P’s complete, comprehensive and universal *Weltenschauung* whose roots are in creation and whose compass embraces all creatures.” Jacob Milgrom, “Two Biblical Hebrew Priestly Terms: šeqeṣ and ṭāmēʾ,” *Maarav* 8 (1992): 116. Cf. Jirí Moskala, “Categorization and Evaluation of Different Kinds of Interpretation of the Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11,” *BR* 46 (2001): 37-41.

17. Abraham Kuruvilla, *Genesis: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 35-36.

18. Jarl Fossum, “Son of God,” *ABD* 6:128-29.

19. “It is now generally agreed that the image of God reflected in human persons is after the manner of a king who establishes statues of himself to assert his sovereign rule where the king himself cannot be present.” Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 32; cf. John Day, *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1–11* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 13-15.

20. The reference to “the man [*hāʾādām*]” is probably a poetic reference to mankind as a whole. However, it may refer to the Lord’s appointment of a specific king (Gen 1:27a, b) to lead the human family (v. 27c) in God’s likeness. The subsequent narrative in Genesis 2:4-25 (being the story of *hāʾādām*, commonly translated “Adam”) introduces a specific image-bearing king to lead the world in reflecting God’s goodness. Beale, *The Temple*, 81-93. Adam fell from that post, but God promised to provide another to fill it (Gen 3:15, traditionally called the protoevangel). When King David received God’s covenant making his throne an eternal dynasty, David exclaimed, “This is the law of the man [*tôrat hāʾādām*], Lord GOD!” (2 Sam 7:19, a.t.). Is that curious phrase, “the law of the man,” a Davidic reference to this ancient creed that David recognized coming to fulfillment in his own throne line? If so, he foresaw Christ—the very image of God (Heb 1:3) and the Second Adam (Rom 5:14-17)—as the fulfillment of what began with the Genesis 1:27 creed.

21. In the New Testament, the apostle John points to the fact that God never provided an idol of himself to adore in worship, but instead revealed his image to us in one another, as the basis for urging Christians to show their love for God by loving one another whom we can see (1 Jn 4:12, 20; cf. Jas 1:27). In a sense, “Human beings are created in the world to be icons of God.” E. J. van Wolde, “The Text as an Eloquent Guide: Rhetorical, Linguistic and Literary Features in Genesis 1,” in *Literary*

Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible, ed. J. P. Fokkelman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 151.

22. Philip Ryken and Michael LeFebvre, *Our Triune God: Living in the Love of the Three-in-One* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 56-57, 92; Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 59-61; Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, Theology and Liberation Series, trans. Paul Burns (Marknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 9-24; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), III/1, 195.

23. Philo, *On the Creation* 24.72-76.

24. Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 68-69.

25. The nature of human dominion is evident even in the name assigned to humankind: "*ʾădāmâ* is . . . J's technical term for arable land, fertile soil that can be cultivated. . . . By contrast, the word *ʾereṣ* is used with a more general sense. . . . The first human, *ʾādām*, is described as the cultivator of *ʾădāmâ*." Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 34-35.

26. Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 52.

27. Calvin, *Genesis*, 99-100; cf. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 33-34; Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 165.

28. Robert P. Gordon, "3201) טוב)," *NIDOTTE* 2:353.

29. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 18.

30. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 34.

31. Luther wrote, "Here Moses seems to be forgetting himself, because he does not deal at all with . . . the creation and the fall of the angels. . . . It is surprising that Moses should remain silent about these weighty matters." Luther, *Lectures in Genesis 1–5*, 22.

Chapter 11: Crowned with Communion (Day 7)

1. Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 33.

2. On possible etymologies for *šabbāt*, see Hendrik L. Bosman, "Sabbath," *NIDOTTE* 4:1157-62.

3. C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 77.

4. Unfortunately, teachings on the sabbath have often been characterized in negative terms. Note, for example, the child's perspective on Sunday provided in Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 83-100. This overly negative approach to the sabbath may be, in part, due to the Puritan reaction to the publication by King James I (in 1617) and King Charles I (republished by him in 1633) of the infamous Book of Sports, which promoted certain recreational activities on the Lord's Day in the United Kingdom. Puritan reaction to this overreach of the king into questions of the church can still be felt in the predominantly negative tone of the Westminster Catechisms' handling of what is permissible on the Lord's Day (WLC 117, 119; WSC 60-61).

5. Cf. Ben C. Ollenburger, "Creation and Peace: Creator and Creature in Genesis 1–11," in *The Old Testament in the Life of God's People: Essays in Honor of Elmer A. Martens*, ed. Jon Isaak (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 143-48.

6. "The [*laʿăśôt*] is a difficult component to incorporate into the grammatical structure but may mean by making, which is to say, deity created all his work by making it." Barry Bandstra, *Genesis 1–11: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 116. Cf. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part One: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 69-70.

7. Cassuto, *Genesis, Part One*, 70.

8. "In the past, biblical theologians, eager to discover theological significance in individual words, have overloaded *br,'* create, with semantic freight in three respects. First, it was commonly emphasized that this vb. is predicated only of Israel's god as subject; second, that *br'* never appears with explicit mention of the material out of which something has been 'created'; third, that *br'* was a uniquely nonmetaphorical, nonanthropomorphic vb. for creation, since it was predicated only of Israel's god . . . These points . . . are, however, somewhat misleading." Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "1343) ברא)," *NIDOTTE* 1:731; cf. Nahum Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (New York: JPS, 1989), 55.

9. Thomas E. McComiskey, "278) ברא)," *TWOT* 1:127. The Piel use of the verb means "to cut" (e.g., Josh 17:15, 18; Ezek 23:47). Most scholars believe the word draws on the idea of carving or

fashioning something. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, *Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 99-100; Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "1343 (ברא)," *NIDOTTE* 1:731-32.

10. Thomas J. Finley, "Dimensions of the Hebrew Word for 'Create' (בָּרָא)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148, no. 592 (1991): 409-23.

11. Normally, the new order God introduces is good (e.g., Ps 148:4-6). But sometimes God brings judgment with a change to nature's order described by the verb *bārāʾ* (e.g., Num 16:30; Is 45:7; Jer 31:22).

12. The verb "he created [*bārāʾ*]" appears seven times in the Genesis 1:1–4:26 creation account. Six of those appearances are in the Gen 1:1–2:3 creation week (1:1, 21, 27 [3x]; 2:3); the seventh introduces the Garden of Eden narrative (Gen 2:3).

13. Stated three times in connection with humanity being in the "image of God."

14. Cf. Ellen van Wolde, "Facing the Earth: Primaeval History in a New Perspective," in *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives*, JSOTSup 257, ed. Philip R. Davies and David J. A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 22-30.

15. For a more extended treatment of the Eden narrative, see Michael LeFebvre, "Adam Reigns in Eden: Genesis and the Origins of Kingship," *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology: Essays on the Historical Adam* 5, no. 2 (2018): 25-57.

16. Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 37-38; Cassuto, *Genesis, Part One*, 100-102; Michael LeFebvre, "Response to Brown," *Ex Auditu* 26 (2010): 22-23.

17. The anticipatory character of the seventh-day text has sometimes been tied to the closing *laʿăśôt* of v. 3. For instance, the medieval Jewish luminaries Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1167) and David Kimhi (ca. 1160–ca. 1235) "understood the final verb [*laʿăśôt*] as connoting '[for man] to [continue to] do [thenceforth]'" (Sarna, *Genesis*, 15) and that "God created roots in all the species, endowing them with the power to reproduce their likeness" (Cassuto, *Genesis, Part One*, 69). Likewise, the *Midrash Rabbah* preserves the interpretation, "He rested from the work of [creating] His world, but not from [his] work [with mankind]." H. Freedman, trans., *Midrash Rabbah* (London: Socino Press, 1939), 1:86. More recently, Schneir Levin, following Chaim Abramowitz, has asserted the anticipatory significance of *laʿăśôt* to build an argument for creation's inbuilt potential *to evolve*—a reading that surely draws too much from the term. Schneir Levin, "Evolution in the Bible," *JBQ* 23, no. 2 (1995): 120-23.

18. Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), xiii-xiv.

Chapter 12: A Calendar for Sabbath, Not Science

1. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, Calvin's Commentaries, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 79-80.

2. Consider Ken Ham's assertion, for example: "Old-earth theologies were essentially nonexistent prior to 1800. This fact alone provides strong evidence that these views are not derived from the Bible. Instead, they are an attempt to accommodate the long ages promoted by uniformitarian science." Ken Ham, *The Lie: Evolution/Millions of Years* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2013), 207. See also the same assertion by Ligon Duncan and David Hall: "The day-age view first arose when jazz was on the rise in America, while the framework view only surfaced in English just before the Beatles! Conversely, the 24-hour view has been the consensus of the Church since the earliest hymns, chants, and doxologies." Ligon Duncan III and David Hall, "The 24-Hour Reply," in *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, ed. David Hagopian (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux Press, 2001), 99.

3. Robert Letham, "'In the Space of Six Days': The Days of Creation from Origen to the Westminster Assembly," *WTJ* 61 (1999): 174. See esp. Craig Allert, *Early Christian Readings of Genesis One: Patristic Exegesis and Literal Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018).

4. Origen *De Principiis* 4.16, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. Frederick Crombie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 4:365.

5. Francis Watson, "Genesis Before Darwin: Why Scripture Needed Liberating from Science," in *Reading Genesis After Darwin*, ed. Stephen C. Barton and David Wilkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23-37; Andrew Louth, "The Six Days of Creation According to the Greek Fathers," in Barton and Wilkinson, *Reading Genesis After Darwin*, 39-55.

6. Letham, "'In the Space of Six Days,'" 164.

7. On the approaches to Gen 1 among the early church fathers, see Allert, *Early Readings of Genesis One*. Ronald Numbers traces the origins of the young earth creationism view to 1923, when George McCready Price first suggested that Noah's flood could explain the appearance of age in the geological record. Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); cf. George McCready Price, *The New Geology: A Textbook for Colleges, Normal Schools, and Training Schools; and for the General Reader* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923). According to Karl Giberson, Ellen White (founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church) formulated the flood geology argument later popularized by Price. "Modern young-earth creationism can be traced to her [Ellen White's] visionary expansion of

the Genesis flood narrative." Karl W. Giberson, "Adventist Origins of Young Earth Creationism," 1, posted at www.biologos.org, reprinted from Karl W. Giberson, *Saving Darwin: How to Be a Christian and Believe Evolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

8. Allert, *Early Readings of Genesis One*, 284.

9. For a summary of Augustine's views on the creation week, see Louis Lavellee, "Augustine on the Creation Days," *JETS* 32, no. 4 (1989): 457-64; and Allert, *Early Readings of Genesis One*, 266-302.

10. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis: Volume 1, Books 1–6*, Ancient Christian Writers 41, trans. John Hammond Taylor (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 2.5.9 (see excursus "Augustine and Luther on the Second Day" in chapter 9).

11. See "Day Two: Heavens," in chapter 9.

12. Watson, "Genesis Before Darwin," 24, emphasis removed.

13. Many young earth creationists would be surprised to know that even William Jennings Bryan of Scopes Trial fame held to a day age view of the Genesis creation week. Numbers, *Creationists*, 55-59.

14. "Though the Bible upholds the idea that God is *responsible* for all origins . . . , if the Bible does not offer an *account* of material origins [i.e., a scientific record] we are free to consider contemporary explanations of origins on their own merits." John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 131; cf. p. 151-67.

15. Philosophers distinguish between methodological and metaphysical naturalism. It is generally agreed that science is methodologically limited to the study of tangible, natural phenomena (i.e., *methodological* naturalism). However, *metaphysical* naturalism is the further, unsubstantiated claim that only that which is scientifically testable exists. The term *evolutionary naturalism* is used in the latter sense: the supposition that evolution is not only a process of nature but is a process capable of explaining everything that exists. See Thomas B. Fowler and Daniel Kuebler, *The Evolution Controversy: A Survey of Competing Theories* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 123-25; Robert T. Pennock, ed., *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); Alvin Plantinga, "Methodological Naturalism? (Part 1)," *Origins & Design* 18, no. 1 (1997), online at www.arn.org/docs/odesign/od181/methnat181.htm; and "Methodological Naturalism? (Part 2)," *Origins & Design* 18, no. 2 (1997), online at www.arn.org/docs/odesign/od182/methnat182.htm.

16. For arguments promoting naturalism, see Richard Dawkins, *The Magic of Reality: How We Know What's Real* (New York: Free Press, 2014). For arguments against naturalism, see Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

17. Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 5.

18. Ham, *Lie*, 160 (emphasis original).

19. In fact, Ham goes on to say, "The main reason, we believe, that the Church is so relatively ineffective is a direct result of . . . not evangelizing correctly. The Church is proclaiming the message of the Cross and Christ, but it is not as effective as it used to be." Ham, *Lie*, 160. This is an astonishing assertion! Positing a unique interpretation of 1 Cor 1:23 (i.e., that Paul's realization of the cross's foolishness to the Greeks means we should develop different approaches to avoid the cross being called foolish), Ham claims that confronting evolution is the necessary precursor to announcing the cross. This seems a remarkable demotion of the power of the cross! What Paul actually states in 1 Cor

1:23 is that the cross is folly to the Greeks, *but we preach it anyway* since "to those who are called, . . . [it is] the wisdom of God" (v. 24). Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 47-48. Consequently, one could argue that Ham's ascribing anti-evolutionary polemics with a central place in evangelism while marginalizing the cross to a secondary role actually undermines evangelism. Robert Godfrey's counsel is wise: "Just as we must beware of anti-Christian forms of thought that claim to be science [e.g., pseudoreligious, evolutionary naturalism], so we must beware of anti-intellectualism and an inappropriate rejection of science parading itself as Christianity. As Christians we must not tie our faith to a pseudoscience of human invention, whether by a fad of secular science or so-called creation science. We must not hobble the evangelistic work of the church by embracing a false science of any kind." Robert Godfrey, *God's Pattern for Creation: A Covenantal Reading of Genesis 1* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 91.

20. Ken Ham, *Six Days: The Age of the Earth and the Decline of the Church* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2014), 96-97.

21. Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 127. For a response to Ehrman, see Andreas J. Köstenberger et al., *Truth in a Culture of Doubt: Engaging Skeptical Challenges to the Bible* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2014), 13-31.

22. Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, ix.

23. Charles Hodge, *What Is Darwinism?* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Company, 1874), 177. However, it is important to note further that Charles Hodge was not a young earth creationist. Even though Hodge "concluded that Darwinism was atheism . . . , [he] conceded the great antiquity of the earth and gave his imprimatur to . . . [the] interpretation of the days of Genesis as geological epochs" (Numbers, *Creationists*, 26). In fact, Mark Noll and David Livingstone have recently argued that Hodge's identification of Darwinism with atheism is specifically nuanced to focus only on the Darwinian formulation of evolution, not to deny the viability of evolution generally as a process of God's creation. "Hodge, let it be said, had his doubts about both evolution as such and natural selection as a principle of biological descent," Noll and Livingstone observe; however, "[Hodge was] attacking not evolution as such, not even the principle of 'natural selection' . . . , but [he was attacking] . . . the 'ateleological' character of Darwin's conception of natural selection." Hodge only calls *Darwinian* evolution (not all theories of evolution) atheistic because Darwin's formulation denied any divine involvement in the process. Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone, "Charles Hodge and the Definition of 'Darwinism,'" in *What Is Darwinism? And Other Writings on Science and Religion*, ed. Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 29-30.

24. John Rogerson has shown how little impact Darwin's arguments actually had on debates about the interpretation of Genesis 1 in the initial period after *Origin of Species.* John Rogerson, "What Difference Did Darwin Make? The Interpretation of Genesis in the Nineteenth Century," in Barton and Wilkinson, *Genesis After Darwin*, 75-91.

25. B. B. Warfield, "Evolution or Development" (lecture, Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary, December 1888). Quoted in David N. Livingstone and Mark A. Noll, "B. B. Warfield (1851–1921): A Biblical Inerrantist as Evolutionist," *Isis* 91 (2000): 293, 296.

26. Although he seemed to come close at times, in a 1915 article Warfield argued that "Calvin's doctrine of creation is . . . for all except the souls of men, an evolutionary one." B. B. Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Creation," *Princeton Theological Review* 13 (1915): 208.

27. Livingstone and Noll, “B. B. Warfield (1851–1921),” 283.

28. Fred G. Zaspel, “Additional Note: B. B. Warfield Did Not Endorse Theistic Evolution as It Is Understood Today,” in *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*, ed. J. P. Moreland et al. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 953-72.

29. Denis R. Alexander, *Rebuilding the Matrix: Science and Faith in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 294-95.

30. Ronald Numbers traces this presuppositional surrender ultimately to David Nevins Lord (1792–1880), a Christian businessman who also wrote books about creationism. David Lord first laid down the gauntlet: “It is clear that if the geological theory is true, the Mosaic history is not, and thence that the sacred volume at large, which everywhere recognizes that history as divine, cannot be from God.” Quoted in Numbers, *Creationists*, 31.

31. Cf. Peter Addinall, *Philosophy and Biblical Interpretation: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

32. James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis 1:1–11:*32, vol. 1 in *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 61.

33. Alan Leshner, “Public Praises Science; Scientists Fault Public, Media: Scientific Achievements Less Prominent than a Decade Ago” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2009), 16.

34. Chephra McKee and Kristin Bohannon, “Exploring the Reasons Behind Parental Refusal of Vaccines,” *Journal of Pediatric Pharmacology and Therapeutics* 21, no. 2 (2016): 106.

35. Cf. “Vaccine Development, Testing, and Regulation,” January 27, 2016, www.historyofvaccines.org/content/articles/vaccine-development-testing-and-regulation.

36. Richard Holdeman, “Threats Real and Perceived,” Gentle Reformation, January 22, 2015, http://gentlereformation.com/2015/01/22/threats-real-and-perceived/.

37. Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 28. For an insightful critique of trends in modern psychiatry from within the field, see M. D. Frances Allen, *Saving Normal: An Insider’s Revolt Against Out-of-Control Psychiatric Diagnosis, DSM-5, Big Pharma, and the Medicalization of Ordinary Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013).

38. Note Adams’s repeated references to evolution in his dispute with various schools of psychiatry: Adams, *Shepherding God’s Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 160-65. For an excellent alternative, note the helpful perspective offered by David P. Murray, *Christians Get Depressed Too: Hope and Help for Depressed People* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010).

39. Even though the consensus is stunning. “During 2013 and 2014, only 4 of 69,406 authors of peer-reviewed articles on global warming, 0.0058% or 1 in 17,352, rejected AGW [anthropogenic global warming]. Thus, the consensus on AGW among publishing scientists is above 99.99%, verging on unanimity.” There is rarely anything in science that attains that level of unanimity. See James Lawrence Powell, “Climate Scientists Virtually Unanimous: Anthropogenic Global Warming is True,” *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society* 35, nos. 5–6 (2015): 121.

40. Josh Reneau, “Evolution, the Environment, and Religion,” National Center for Science Education, May 15, 2015, https://ncse.com/blog/2015/05/evolution-environment-religion-0016359.

One would think that Christians would be leading the charge that the physical world is negatively impacted by human pride and greed. Even without scientific reasons for making this connection, the Scriptures provide abundant references to the spiritual impact of human sin on the climate. For an interesting survey of John Calvin's attention to the impact of human sin on the environment, see Jason Foster, "The Ecology of John Calvin," *Reformed Perspectives Magazine* 7, no. 15 (2005), online at reformedperspectives.org/articles/jas_foster/pt.jas_foster.calvin.ecology.html.

41. For a telling testimony of one young Christian's discouragement from pursuing a career in the sciences because of these dynamics, see Dennis R. Venema and Scot McKnight, *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture After Genetic Science* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2017), ix-x.

42. In 1615, Galileo wrote a letter on the relationship of faith and science that remains surprisingly relevant to our contemporary context. An internet search will readily provide access to this fascinating document online: Galileo Galilei, "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina of Tuscany" (1615). It is also available in *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, trans. Stillman Drake (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), 175-216.

43. Owen Gingerich, *God's Planet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 7-55.

44. John Edwards, *A Demonstration of the Existence and Providence of God from the Contemplation of the Visible Structure of the Greater and Lesser World* (London: Jonathan Robinson, 1696), 33-35.

45. Gingerich, *God's Planet*, 55.

46. Gerardus D. Bouw, *A Geocentricity Primer: Introduction to Biblical Cosmology* (Cleveland, OH: The Biblical Astronomer, 2004), ii.

47. By our modern convention of *exclusive* counting, eight days would mean Monday of the following week (i.e., the beginning Sunday of the count = day 0; Mon. = 1; Tues. = 2; Wed. = 3; Thurs. = 4; Fri. = 5; Sat. = 6; Sun. = 7; Mon. = 8). However, by Hebraic *inclusive* counting (which is the form of counting used in this passage), eight days later would mean the following Sunday (i.e., the beginning Sunday of the count = day 1; Mon. = 2; Tues. = 3; Wed. = 4; Thurs. = 5; Fri. = 6; Sat. = 7; Sun. = 8).

48. Furthermore, the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the gathered, New Testament church was also a Sunday (Lev 23:16; Acts 2:1-41).

49. Epistle of Barnabas, chap. 15, in *ANF* 1:146-47.

50. Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, §9, in *The Apostolic Fathers: Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp*, trans. J. B. Lightfoot (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 2.2.552. For more early church testimony and analysis, see Richard J. Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 251-98.

51. Major exceptions to this practice are Messianic Jews, Seventh-day Adventists, and Seventh-day Baptists. The summary explanation provided here for a first-day sabbath (also known as "the Lord's Day") will not engage directly with the arguments of these modern seventh-day sabbatarians. It is not essential to the argument of this book whether, indeed, the sabbath should be observed on the seventh or the first day of the week. My purpose is to encourage the creation week cadence, leaving a full engagement with the question of its first-day or seventh-day observance to other contexts.

52. Cf. Richard J. Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," in Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 221-50.

53. *Bereshith Rabbah* 17.5-8.

54. “καινός (‘new’) usually indicates newness in terms of quality, not time. . . . In the light of the qualitative nature of the contrast between ‘new’ creation and ‘first’ creation, it is likely that the meaning of the figurative portrayal is to connote a radically changed cosmos . . . the transformation of the old creation rather than an outright new creation *ex nihilo*.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1039-41.

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"*The Liturgy of Creation* is an important book for many reasons. First LeFebvre helps us understand the Israelite calendar in relationship to the significant annual festivals that were so central to the life and theology of the Old Testament people of God. His work on the calendar itself is worth reading, but he goes further and draws crucial conclusions concerning creation in a way that affects the present debate over the relationship between science and faith. This book is essential reading for all serious students of the Old Testament."
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"Michael LeFebvre has given us a significant contribution to understanding the early chapters of Genesis in a way that is faithful to the Bible and avoids the pitfalls of anachronistic readings of the text. His hermeneutical insights are tremendously helpful for understanding the concepts of time, chronology, calendar, and worship in the Bible and how these concepts are often confused when read through modern eyes. With the sharp mind of a theologian and the humble heart of a pastor, LeFebvre makes a compelling and eminently readable case for understanding the creation narrative as calendar text. In doing so, he calls us to the true priorities of the creation account."
Richard Holdeman, senior pastor of Bloomington Reformed Presbyterian Church, senior lecturer in biology, Indiana University

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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