

Science, the Bible, and the Promised Land: An Analysis of John Sailhamer's Genesis Unbound

By Matt Perman¹

There is a genius in Genesis 1-3 that is often concealed by modern interpretations of the text. The genius of these chapters is the profound significance they give to the destination of the redeemed by establishing a unity between God's work of creation and plan of redemption. Many modern interpretations of Genesis, unfortunately, obscure this genius by assuming that the six days of Genesis 1 are about the creation of the entire universe. Additionally, this assumption places Genesis in direct opposition to what appear to be the solid findings of modern science concerning the age and creation of the universe.

"Because of this error," writes Dr. John Sailhamer in his provocative book *Genesis Unbound*, "many Christians have felt torn between an allegiance to the Bible and a recognition of the findings of modern science—a tear that is neither necessary nor helpful" (John Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound* [Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996], p. 13). The purpose of *Genesis Unbound* is to show that this tear is not necessary because "when Genesis 1 and 2 are understood as...Moses intended them to be understood, nearly all the difficulties that perplex modern readers instantly vanish" (13-14).

Sailhamer's convincing analysis of Genesis not only resolves the apparent conflict between science and the Bible, but also (and, I would argue, more importantly) opens up to us the depths of God's plan to bless His people. *Genesis Unbound* unveils the genius of Genesis 1-3 that is so obscured by many modern interpretations and will consequently make you marvel at the ways of God in creation and redemption and give you a stronger comprehension of the profound unity of the Bible.

My purpose in this analysis of *Genesis Unbound* is to set forth the understanding of Genesis 1-3 that Sailhamer argues for (called "historical creationism"), why I believe that his understanding is correct, and to more fully develop the amazing implications of his view that he brings out. For this reason, this will not strictly be a review of the book, but more of an "expansive" analysis of the book. My motive and prayer in this work is the same as Sailhamer's goal in writing *Genesis Unbound*, namely that "you will come away with a new appreciation for and understanding of the genius of these first three chapters of the Bible. We should be awed and grateful that God chose to give us this remarkable glimpse into His mighty works at the dawn of time!" (16).

Overview

Genesis Unbound is divided into four parts. The first part explains why the issue of science and the Bible is important. Part two marshals out the evidence for historical creationism and why it resolves the apparent conflict of science and the Bible. It is thus "the heart of the book" (15). Part three seeks to clarify the picture by taking the reader through a brief exposition of Genesis 1:1-2:4a. As such, it builds "on the foundations laid previously in the book" in part two (16). Finally, part four is written to give us "a better sense of the historical, philosophical, and interpretive issues that brought us to where we are today" (16). It shows that Sailhamer's view is not new, but was held by many before the rise of modern science. And it shows where the erroneous interpretations of Genesis came from.

In this analysis, I will not strictly follow Sailhamer's format. Instead of marshaling out the evidence and then clarifying the picture in two separate stages as Sailhamer does, I will seek to clarify the picture as I marshal out the evidence. Then, I will seek to show the glory that is revealed by the genius of Genesis 1-3 by stepping back to behold the whole picture as it relates to the rest of the Bible.

¹ Perman's work has not formally been published. This edition has been reformatted and edited by B.C. McWhite.

There are two main ways that you can establish your case for something. The first way is to build your case as you go through the arguments for it and then unveil it in its entirety at the end. In this method the arguments function almost like pieces of a puzzle that don't come together in their full unity until the very end. The benefit of this method is that it preserves mystery and thus perhaps a greater "aha" experience when the full puzzle is finally unveiled. But the difficulty is that it is hard to do this in a coherent way that does not "lose" the reader due to the lack of a system in which to place the arguments as he reads.

The second way to argue your case is to state your view first and then argue for it. This often gives greater coherence to your case when you build your arguments because the reader will have an overall framework in which to place them. In other words, he will not get lost because you will have given him a map that shows him where he is headed. Thus, the reader can more directly see how each successive argument fits into the large scheme of things, how they connect to each other, and how they connect to your overall aim in writing. The result is that your case will generally be easier to follow and will probably stimulate more connections between your arguments in the reader's mind.

This is the approach that Sailhamer takes. He reveals his view in its entirety first and then backs up to build his case for it. This is, I think, a major strength of the book because it gives the reader a framework in which to integrate the arguments and thus makes it easier to evaluate them. But, of course, it reveals that Sailhamer is "neither a card shark or a successful novelist," for as he himself says, "right at the beginning I want to show you my hand and reveal some of my best plot twists" (13).

Historical Creationism and the "Unbinding" of Genesis

To see the uniqueness of *Genesis Unbound*, we must recognize that there are three main positions on the apparent conflict between science and the Bible. Creationism, first of all, teaches that, according to Genesis, God made the universe in six twenty-four hour days and therefore the earth is very young (since humans, who were created on the sixth day, have only been around for perhaps 10 to 20 thousand years). This view declares that modern science is wrong in its belief that the earth is old and generally attempts to provide its own scientific evidence to counter the evidence for an old earth.

Second, progressive creationism teaches that the days of Genesis are not twenty-four hour periods, but unspecified periods of time (ages) in which God made the universe. This view, unlike creationism, agrees with the scientific evidence for an old earth, but, like creationism, does not accept evolution. Theistic evolution, on the other hand, teaches that the earth is old and that God used evolution to create the universe.

Sailhamer's view, called "historical creationism," affirms the inerrancy of the Bible, upholds the historicity of Genesis, and rejects evolution—just like creationism and progressive creationism. As Sailhamer writes, the author of Genesis "does not expect to be understood as writing mythology or poetry. His account, as he understands it, is a historical account of creation" (45).[1] The main difference is that historical creationism denies the three central assumptions lying behind the other three views. These three assumptions are, first, "that the chapters' primary purpose is merely to describe how God created the world. Another is that originally the world was a formless mass, which God shaped into the world we know today. A third is 'the land' which God made during the six days is 'the earth' in its entirety, as we know it today" (11).

The early chapters of Genesis are "bound" by several bad translations in the English Bible "because those incorrect assumptions lie behind the English translations of Genesis 1 and 2 which we use today. Like it or not, Genesis in the English Bible is 'bound' by those assumptions. A major part of my task in this book is to loose those bonds and release the chapters to speak for themselves. Hence, the title" (11). What, then, is the meaning of these early chapters in Genesis that has been "bound" so often by these assumptions? To this question we will now turn.

The Meaning of Genesis 1 and 2

Sailhamer argues that Genesis 1 and 2 recount “two great acts of God” (14). The first great act is the creation of the entire universe: our planet, the animals, the sun, moon, stars, etc. This is recounted in 1:1, which declares that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The Hebrew word translated “beginning” does not mean an instant of time, but an “indefinite period of time.” Since, then, God created the entire universe in an unspecified period of time, “we cannot say for certain when God created the world or how long he took to create it” (14). For this reason, the scientific evidence for an old universe does not contradict Genesis 1. And this is the case even if we interpret the “days” as twenty four hour periods and not ages of time.

The second great act of God is recounted in 1:2-2:24 and “deals with a much more limited scope and period of time. Beginning with Genesis 1:2, the biblical narrative recounts God’s preparation of a land for the man and woman He was to create. That ‘land’ was the same land later promised to Abraham and his descendants...According to Genesis 1, God prepared that land within a period of a six-day work week. On the sixth day of that week, God created human beings. God then rested on the seventh day” (14). One of the stunning truths this brings to light is that “when Israel was promised a land in which to live out God’s blessings (Gen 15:8), it was not the first time God had prepared a place for them. From the beginning, God had prepared that place for His chosen people” (p. 92). When we understand this, we see that the land is a central unifying theme of God’s acts of creation and redemption.

In sum, Sailhamer argues that Genesis 1:1 refers to the creation of the entire universe and that God did so over the period of an unspecified length of time that could have been one year or fifteen billion years. The text just does not say. Genesis 1:2 and following, which recount God’s acts during the six days, therefore do not refer to the creation of the universe. They speak of a time after the creation of the universe when God prepared a land (which is the same land later promised to Israel) for Adam and Eve whom he was to create on the sixth day. And the reason that God had to prepare the Garden for Adam and Eve was, among other things, because “the earth [promised land] was formless and void [a deserted wilderness], and darkness was over the surface of the deep” (v. 2).

This view is very uncommon to us today and so it will take much defending. The remainder of this analysis will therefore consist mainly in an unfolding of the main arguments for historical creationism. In other words, now that the “whole picture” of historical creationism has been unveiled, I will back up and argue to the whole picture. I will, however, save the unpacking of some of the greatest implications of Sailhamer’s view until towards the end.

Is Historical Creationism New?

Before expounding and arguing for historical creationism, I think that one of the biggest stumbling blocks needs to be removed: that this view seems new, and thus probably isn’t true. For if something really is in the Bible, it would be hard to argue that the church has entirely missed it for 2,000 years.

Sailhamer’s choice of the name historical creationism is partially motivated by his desire to call attention to the fact that his view is not new. Rather, many theologians of the past held to the central elements of Sailhamer’s view. He writes that “the term ‘historical’ points to the fact that this view of the Genesis creation account can be traced back to a way of reading Genesis 1 and 2 that flourished before the rise of science and its use in biblical interpretation. Before progress in navigation and transportation made global exploration of our world possible, biblical scholars and ordinary people read Genesis 1 within a rather limited geographic scope...consequently, my view is often found in earlier works” (45).

Evidence for this is that many Jewish theologians of the middle ages believed that 1:2ff. (“ff.” means “and the following verses”) referred to the promised land, not entire planet (214). Furthermore,

...These medieval Jewish commentators were followed by some noted Christian scholars. According to John Lightfoote (a widely read biblical exegete, theologian, and a Christian scholar of considerable standing) the Genesis account of creation describes God's preparation of a specific area of land which he identified as the garden of Eden. Lightfoote held that 1:1 states that God created the universe, but from 1:2 through the end of the chapter, the passage focuses on God's preparation of the land that was to be the garden of Eden. Lightfoote's view was developed further by later Christian scholars (216).

Many other previous scholars have held that the Garden of Eden was within the promised land. Johann Heidegger of the seventeenth century is one example. Another example are the early Jewish rabbis who thought Adam was created from the ground that the temple was built on (220).

The Creation of the Entire Universe: Genesis 1:1

The Meaning of "In the beginning..."

Sailhamer argues,

The Hebrew word *reshit*, which is the term for 'beginning' used in Genesis 1:1, has a very specific sense in Scripture. In the Bible the term always refers to an extended, yet indeterminate duration of time—not a specific moment. It is a block of time that precedes an extended series of time periods. It is a 'time before time.' The term does not refer to a point in time but to a period or duration of time which falls before a series of events (38).

As evidence, he refers to Job 8:7, which uses the word to refer not to a single moment in Job's life, but to the "early part of Job's life, before his misfortunes overtook him" (38). Though not speaking temporally, Genesis 10:10 uses the word *reshit* (beginning) to refer "to the early part of Nimrod's kingdom"—not a specific point in the kingdom (38). Especially good evidence comes from the way Israel spoke of the reign of its kings. He writes:

It was common in ancient Israel to begin counting the years of a king's reign from the first of the year—that is, the first day of the month of Nisan. If the king assumed office prior to that day, as was frequently the case, the time that preceded the first of the year was not reckoned as part of his reign. That time was called 'the beginning' (*reshit*). In a few biblical cases 'the beginning' of a king's reign amounted to several years. According to Jeremiah 28:1, for example, the 'beginning' of King Zedekiah's reign included events which happened four years after he had assumed the throne. In this case the NIV translated the word 'beginning' simply as 'early in the reign of Zedekiah' (39).

Finally, "it is important to realize that other Hebrew words were available to the author to convey the temporal concept of a 'beginning.' In fact, throughout the Pentateuch the author uses other Hebrew words to express such a concept" (40).

Thus, "the beginning" in Genesis 1:1 speaks of an unspecified length of time, not a single instant of time. And what did God do in this "beginning"? The text says that he "created the heavens and the earth." Before we can most clearly see the implications of this, we must understand what Moses meant by the phrase "heavens and earth." And in order to understand the meaning of the phrase "heavens and earth" we must also understand the meanings of the words "earth" and "sky." Then we will come back and put the pieces together.

The Meaning of "Earth"

We must be careful not to fill up ancient words with modern meanings. When we hear the word "earth" in our scientific age, we generally think of the big jewel we are on which orbits around the sun. But the term

did not generally suggest such a meaning to those in the pre-space age time when Genesis was written, for they did not generally know of the “global” dimensions of the planet. Thus, the term “earth” (*eretz* in Hebrew) in Genesis does not usually refer to the entire planet, but to a specific section of land. Sometimes *eretz* does refer to the whole world (Genesis 18:25). But most often it does not. Most of the time *eretz* refers to a localized segment of the planet, such as the “land of Egypt” (Genesis 45:8), the “dry ground” (Genesis 1:10), or the land promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18). In these cases, *eretz* is best translated as “land,” not “earth,” as many translations reflect.

The Meaning of “Heavens”

The word translated as “heavens” (*shamayim*), like the word for earth (*eretz*), usually refers to a localized area. In pre-space age writings, it usually does not mean “outer space” as we know it today, but usually refers to a localized section of sky—the area above the “land.” In Genesis 1:20, for example, it is the place where the birds fly. In such cases, it is best rendered as “sky” and not “heavens.”

The Meaning of “Heavens and the Earth”

It is important to have this general understanding of the usage of the terms “sky” and “land” in order to understand whether “earth” carries the same meaning in verse one (“...God created the heavens and the earth”) as it does in verse two (“And the earth was formless and void”). Sailhamer argues that they do not. In verse two, “earth” refers to a localized section of land. But in verse one, the fact that it is connected with the word “heavens” shows that it is being used differently. This is because “when these two terms [sky and land] are used together as a figure of speech, they take on a distinct meaning of their own. Together, they mean far more than the sum of the meanings of the two individual words” (55). Many word combinations are like this. For example, the word “blackboard” means more than what the combination of the words “black” and “board” suggest. Blackboard does not simply mean a board that is black. It means a board that one writes on with chalk. Sometimes the blackboard is green or white, but it is usually still called a “blackboard” because “the two words together mean something quite different than each one separately” (55).

It is the same with the phrase “heavens and earth” (that is, “sky and land”). When used together, they “form a figure of speech called a ‘merism.’ A merism combines two words to express a single idea. A merism expresses ‘totality’ by combining two contrasts or two extremes” (56). We see this, for example, in Psalm 139:2 where David says that God knows him sitting down and rising up. David is pointing to God’s knowledge of these two extremes: sitting down and rising up—to show that God knows everything about him. Since God knows David’s rising and sitting down, God must also know everything in between. Thus, “the concept of ‘everything’ is expressed by combining the two opposites ‘my sitting down’ and ‘my rising up’” (56).

Likewise, “sky” and “land” represent two extremes. Thus, “by linking these two extremes into a single expression—‘sky and land’ or ‘heavens and earth’—the Hebrew language expresses the totality of all that exists. Unlike English, Hebrew doesn’t have a single word to express the concept of ‘the universe’; it must do so by means of a merism. The expression ‘sky and land’ thus stands for the ‘entirety of the universe’” (56).

We see “sky and land” used in this way, for example, in Isaiah 44:24: “I, the Lord, am the maker of all things, stretching out the heavens by Myself, and spreading out the earth all alone.” God illustrates the fact that He created all things by pointing to His creation of the two extremes of the sky and the land.

How “The Beginning” Relates to “The Heavens and the Earth”

When we tie together the meaning of the phrases “in the beginning” and “heavens and earth” we see the main thrust of Sailhamer’s view. When Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” it is stating that God created the entire universe in an unspecified duration of time. By using the merism “heavens and earth,” Genesis 1:1 is stating that God created everything. And by using the phrase “in

the beginning," it is stating that God did so not in an instant of time, but in a period of time. Thus, Genesis 1:1 is stating that God created everything there is in a period of time that is left unspecified.

The Relationship of Genesis 1:1 to the Rest of the Chapter

The question that this raised is whether "the beginning" includes the seven days of the following verses (1:2-2:4) or whether "the beginning" refers to a period of time that elapsed before the days of creation recorded in Genesis 1:2-2:4. In other words, is Genesis 1:1 ("in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth") a title to the entire chapter which summarizes the content of the following verses, or is Genesis 1:1 a distinct act which sequentially comes before the events of the following verses?

If Genesis 1:1 is a title for the chapter, then verses 1 and 2 together are saying, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now what follows in the rest of the chapter is the account of how he did it." But if Genesis 1:1 is not a title for the chapter, then verses 1 and 2 together are saying, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. After he had done this, he took notice of the fact that the land [where he planned to place man, as we will see] was deserted and dark. So God began to prepare this section of land for man's inhabitation. First, he said 'Let there be light...'"

Sailhamer successfully argues for the second alternative: that "the beginning" is not a title to the chapter but a distinct act of God that occurred in a period of time that elapsed before the six days enumerated in 1:2ff. First, he argues, Genesis 1:1 is not a title summarizing the rest of the chapter because titles in Hebrew consist of simple phrases. But Genesis 1:1 is a complete sentence and makes a statement. This is not how titles are formed in Hebrew. For example, Gen 5:1, which functions as a title to the following verses, reads like this: "This is the book of the generations of Adam."

Second, Genesis 1:1 cannot be a title for the rest of the chapter because the next verse begins with the conjunction "and." But if 1:1 were a title in Hebrew, "the section immediately following it would surely not begin with the conjunction 'and.'" (103). The fact that Sailhamer is considered an expert in biblical Hebrew makes one confident that he knows what he is talking about here.

Third and finally, Genesis 1:1 cannot be a title for the rest of the chapter because there is a summary title at the conclusion of the thought unit begun in chapter one (Genesis 2:1). This would make a title at the beginning redundant. It is highly unlikely that there would be two titles to the same account.

For these three reasons, we must conclude that "the rest of the chapter is not an elaboration of Genesis 1:1; rather, it is an account of a different and subsequent act of God" (103). Therefore, while verse 1 states that God created everything, the six days that begin in verse 2 and continue through the rest of the chapter are an account of something other than the creation of the universe.

The Implications for Science and the Bible

When we connect the fact that the "beginning" in which God created the universe occurred before the six days of 1:2-2:4 with the fact that the Hebrew word translated "beginning" in 1:1 means an unspecified period of time and not a single instant of time, we see that Genesis does not tell us how long ago God created the universe or how long He took to do it. He therefore could have created it billions of years ago or thousands of years ago. He may have taken a week, or he may have taken eons. The text does not say. The Scripture says that God created the world in a period of time called "the beginning" but does not say how long that period of time was or when it began. Therefore, the Bible has no quarrel with the overwhelming scientific evidence that the earth is billions of years old.[2] A Christian is free to behold the glory of God in the truths science is uncovering about the universe without having to protect these facts from contradicting a certain understanding of Genesis.

The Preparation of the Promised Land: Genesis 1:2ff.

But if Genesis 1:1 refers to the creation of the entire universe in an unspecified duration of time, several questions arise. First, if Genesis 1:2ff. is not about creation, then what is it about? Second, does Genesis 1:2ff. concern the whole universe like verse one does, or does it record events that occurred in a particular section of the planet? Third, if it is the later, what is the identity of this section of the planet? These three questions can be boiled down to one: Since the creation of the universe is finished before the six days of Genesis one ever begin, then what is God doing for the six days throughout the rest of the chapter?

The answer Sailhamer gives is the heart of the book: God is preparing the Promised Land for the inhabitation of the human race he will bring into existence on the sixth day. Having affirmed that God is the creator of all things in verse one, Moses immediately moves on in verse two to emphasize the work of God in preparing a special place within this creation for his creatures. It is the preparation of a certain land, not the creation of the entire universe, that is recounted in the six days of Genesis one.

I will now back up and attempt to show this in three steps which correspond to the three questions raised above. First, I will attempt to show that 1:2ff. does not concern the universe or planet earth as a whole, but a localized section of land within the earth. Second, I will attempt to show that in the six days of creation God is preparing this land for man and not creating it. Third, I will attempt to demonstrate that this land is the Promised Land.

What is meant by “earth” in verse 2?

There are several reasons that establish that the six days of Genesis refer not to the entire universe or even the entire planet, but instead refer to a localized piece of land on the earth.

Genesis 1:2 narrows the focus to “the land”

First, verse two serves to alter the focus of the narrative from “the heavens and the earth” (i.e., the whole universe), which was the focus of verse one, to merely “the earth.” This is evident just from reading the passage: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and void...” As we will see below, everything God does in the six days of chapter one involves transforming the land out of this state of being “formless and void.” In other words, the focus shifts from the universe to “the earth” in verse two and the focus remains “the earth” for the rest of the chapter. So the chapter does not, then, refer to something that God is doing to the whole universe but something that he is doing on the earth.

That “the earth” is a localized section of land in verse two and not the entire planet is evident from what we saw earlier about the meaning of the word “earth.” As we saw, the word translated “earth” in Genesis 1:2 (*eretz*) did not generally suggest to those in Moses’ pre-space age day the large ball on which we are orbiting sun. Rather, *eretz* usually means a localized section of the earth, not the whole planet, and thus is usually best translated as land.

The context of the creation account itself suggests that we are to interpret *eretz* in verse two as “land” and not “whole planet.” In Genesis 1:10, “land” [*eretz*] is defined as the dry ground where Adam and Eve were to dwell as opposed to the seas. Sailhamer points out that “the ‘seas’ do not cover the ‘land,’ as would be the case if the term meant ‘earth.’ Rather the ‘seas’ lie adjacent to the ‘land’ and within it” (49). Further, “land” is defined by its contrast to the seas (Genesis 1:10) and sky (Genesis 1:20)—not in contrast to the stars and planets as would be the case if “land” (*eretz*) was being used to mean “planet earth.” Thus, there is good precedent in the text to understand *eretz* in a restricted sense in verse 2. Consequently, since verse two refers to a certain piece of land and not the whole planet, the rest of the chapter, which describes God’s work on this land to make it inhabited, is not about the entire planet but a section of land within the planet.

Genesis 2 shows that the focus of Genesis 1 is “the land”

Second, that the location of God's activity in the six days is a localized section of land is supported by the close relationship between Genesis chapter one and Genesis chapter two. It was a common literary strategy of the Hebrews to give a general description of an event followed by a more specific account of that same event. For example, Genesis 10 gives a general description of the various nations according to their languages and countries, and then chapter 11 backs up to explain the origin of the various languages and countries. Similarly, Genesis 1 gives a general overview of God's work and Genesis 2 gives a more specific look at that same work. This seems evident even from a quick reading of the chapters.

So it seems that both chapters are about the same events viewed from different perspectives. Since the setting of chapter two is clearly a localized section of land, and not the entire planet, it follows that the six days of chapter one concern a localized segment of land and not the entire planet or universe.

What God is doing in 1:2ff

This brings us to the second question: What is God doing to this land in 1:2ff? If he is not creating it? The answer is that, though the land was already created "in the beginning"—since that is when God created everything ("the heavens and the earth")—the land was not yet a fit dwelling place for the humans that God was to create on the sixth day. It was "formless and void" (v. 2). So the six days are the account of how God prepared the land for man's inhabitation. There are several considerations that show this.

The flow of thought

First, this is shown by the flow of thought. As the narrative opens in verse 2, the land is not non-existent, but uninhabited, covered by water, and shrouded in darkness (v. 2). Then, in verses 1:3-2:1, "God brings light and dry land and fills it with fruit trees and animals"—which takes the land not out of nonexistence, but out of the bad condition of verse 2. Thus, "by the sixth day, 'the land' is suitable place for the man and the woman to dwell" (30). The land goes from disorder to order in 1:2ff., not non-existence to existence. This will be made more evident below.

The meaning of "formless and void"

The second reason to believe that 1:2ff is the account of God preparing the land is from the meaning of the Hebrew phrase *tohu vavohu* in verse two, which is translated in most versions as "formless and void." Sailhamer points out that the early English translators of the Bible were influenced to a great extent by the prevailing Greek view of creation in their day and therefore thought this phrase meant that "God did not originally create the world in the condition in which we now see it. Instead, He created the universe as a shapeless mass of material, only later forming the world we now know.... In this way, the biblical account of creation could be shown to be 'true' because it conformed to the generally accepted Greek cosmologies" (62). Therefore, they translated *tohu wabu* as "formless and void."

Many Jewish-Greek translations of the middle ages disagreed with this translation. Likewise, Jewish interpreters around the era 300-200 B.C. rendered *tohu vavohu* not as "formless and void" but as "desolate without human beings or beasts and void of all cultivation of plants and trees" (64). This early view, Sailhamer argues, is essentially correct. *Tohu vavohu* conveys the idea of "uninhabitable wilderness" and not "formless and void chaos." Thus, Genesis 1:2, in saying that the land was "*tohu vavohu*," is simply stating that it was a deserted wilderness and thus not yet fit for mankind's inhabitation. This, of course, presupposes its existence and focuses the readers attention on what God will do to make the land fit for man.

"Uninhabitable wilderness" is the meaning of *tohu vavohu* throughout the Scriptures. For example, it is this phrase that describes the wilderness in which Israel wandered for forty years before entering the promised land (Deuteronomy 32:10). Ironically, later on Jeremiah 4:23-26 uses *tohu vavohu* to describe the promised land after Israel has been exiled from it because of disobedience. Verse 23 says, "I looked on the earth, and

behold, it was formless and void (*tohu vavohu*); and to the heavens, and they had no light (cf. Gen 1:2!).” The following verses in Jeremiah describe the land as a wilderness (v. 26, “the fruitful land was a wilderness”) that is void of humans and birds (v. 25, “there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled”). Thus, the land that is said to be “formless and void” is described as an uninhabited wilderness. Which means that the land is called “formless and void” because it is an uninhabited wilderness.

Consequently, “formless and void” in Jeremiah 4:23 means “uninhabited wilderness” and not “unformed mass.” Just as the land in Genesis 1 was a wilderness before it was made fit for man, so also Israel wandered through a wilderness to get to the land God had promised them—a land which later became a wilderness as a consequence of Israel’s disobedience. As we will see, this parallel points to the fact that the “land” in Genesis 1 is specifically the promised land. For it is hard to escape the conclusion that, in calling the promised land “formless and void” after the exile of Israel, Jeremiah is alluding to Genesis 1:2 to show that this judgment upon Israel returned the land to the state it was in before mankind had existed.

In summary, the correct translation of *tohu vavohu* is not “formless and void,” as if the earth was an unformed mass that God’s work of creation brought to its present form, but “deserted wilderness”—a phrase which presupposes the land’s existence and sets the stage for what God will do to make the land inhabitable. Therefore, the six days of Genesis one are the account of how God transformed the land into a fruitful habitation for man, not the account of how he shaped the world from an unformed mass.

From “deserted” to “good”

Third, there is an interesting word play in the Hebrew which further suggests that what God is doing in 1:2ff is not creating, but transforming the land from a wilderness to a fruitful dwelling for humans. Sailhamer writes, “Even a quick reading of the Hebrew text reveals an obvious wordplay between the terms *tohu* (‘deserted’) and *tov* (‘good’). Before God began His work, the land was ‘deserted’ (*tohu*); then God made it ‘good’ (*tov*)”—that is, the opposite of deserted and thus fit for man (64). The land, thus, went from deserted to inhabited, not uncreated to created.

Because of these and other reasons we have seen, I think it is right to conclude with Sailhamer that “God does not create ‘the land’ in Genesis 1:2-2:4a; He has already created the land and the rest of the universe ‘in the beginning’ in Genesis 1:1. In the remainder of the chapter, God is at work preparing the land for human habitation” (30). This truth is perhaps made clearer by briefly looking at the details of how God prepared the land. This will probably also answer many questions that this raises.

An Exposition of Genesis 1:2-1:31

The need for the land to be prepared

To understand the structure of what God does to prepare the land for man in the six days of Genesis one, we must understand the reason the land was not originally suitable for man’s inhabitation. As we saw above, verse two gives the answer: “And the earth was a deserted wilderness [not ‘formless and void,’ as we have seen], and darkness was over the surface of the deep.” That is, the land was (1) a wilderness and (2) uninhabited. It had no life in it (was uninhabited) because it was not fit for life (it was a wilderness), which is probably because it was dark and covered with water.

God’s method of meeting this need

The following six days explain how God transformed the land from this state into a state that was suitable for man’s inhabitation. These six days may be divided into two parts. On the first set of three days God brought forth light, prepared the sky with clouds, gathered the seas together, made the ground dry, and brought forth vegetation—all so that the land would no longer be a disorderly wilderness. On the second series of three

days God declared his purpose for the lights in the sky, filled the sky with birds and waters with fish, and filled the dry ground with animals-all so that the land would not be uninhabited.[3]

It is significant to recognize that on the first three days, when God brings the land out of its wilderness state, He focuses first on the sky (the first and second day), then on the seas (the second day), and then on the ground (the second and third day). Likewise, in the second set of three days, when God fills the land, He focuses first on the sky (the fourth and fifth days), then on the seas (the fifth day), and then on the ground (the sixth day).

The first three-day period: transforming the wilderness

Day one. God's command on the first day, "let there be light," was the decree for the sun to rise. Sailhamer writes that, "The phrase 'let there be light' doesn't have to mean 'let the light come into existence.' Elsewhere in the Bible, this same phrase is used to describe the sunrise (see Exodus 10:23; Nehemiah 8:3; Genesis 44:3)" (113). That God's command on day one did not concern the creation of light is evident from the fact that the creation of light, sun, moon, and stars would all have been included in the creation of "the heavens and the earth" in verse one. For, as we saw earlier, the phrase "heavens and earth" refers to all that exists. It is a confirmation of this understanding that, in many places in the Old Testament, the phrase "heavens and earth" is expressly shown, it seems, to include the sun, moon, and stars (see Joel 3:15-16).

While God, of course, brings about all sunrises by His decree, this sunrise is emphasized to make the point that a new work of God is commencing. On the first day, God called forth the sunlight, as He does each day, in order to "reveal His work" (113). In bringing out the implications of this, Sailhamer shows just how well this understanding of the first day fits with God's purposes in creation (Genesis 1 and 2) and redemption (Genesis 3-Revelation 22).

The description of the land in Genesis 1:2 fits well with the prophetic vision of the future. After God created the universe, the land lay empty, dark, and barren. It awaited God's call to light and life. Just as the light of the sun broke in upon the primeval darkness, heralding the dawn of God's first blessing (1:3), so also the prophets and the apostles mark the beginning of the new kingdom age of salvation with the light that breaks through the darkness (Isaiah 8:22-9:2; Matthew 4:13-17; John 1:5, 8-9). In that age, God's people will again enjoy the blessings of living in the promised land (Deuteronomy 30:1-5).

Later biblical texts make it clear that such a vision was already at work in the composition of the first chapter of Genesis. The future messianic salvation would be marked by a flowering of the 'desert' wilderness (Isaiah 35:1-2). In the same way, in Genesis 1 God turned the 'wilderness' into the garden of Eden.

God's final acts of salvation are thus foreshadowed in His initial acts of creation. The wilderness awaits its restoration. Henceforth the call to prepare for the coming day of salvation while waiting in the wilderness would become the hallmark of the prophets' vision of the future (Isaiah 40:3; Mark 1:4ff; Revelation 12:6, 14f) (110).

Day two. On the second day, God "prepared the sky with clouds to provide rain for the land. The rain would prepare the land for producing vegetation on the next day" (122). By forming clouds from the dense fog over the land, God made a wide open space between the waters below and the clouds above. This is what God decreed to happen when he said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters" (1:6). God caused clouds to form out of the deep waters that covered the land, and between the clouds above and the waters below there resulted an open space to keep them distinct-the sky.

Day three. This prepared the way for God's act on the third day of causing dry land to come forth. He did this by saying, "let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear" (1:9). Having removed the obstacle the water made to man's inhabitation of the land, God commanded the

land to be filled with plants and fruit trees. As a result of God's decree, "the earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit..." (1:12). This was not when God originally created vegetation. It had already been created "in the beginning" (v. 1). Rather, on this day God caused the land, which had previously been empty of vegetation, to bring forth vegetation so that it would no longer be a wilderness. After this day was over, the land was no longer a wilderness.

The second three-day period: Filling the previously uninhabited land

Day four. On day four, God did not create the sun, moon, and stars (they had been created in the beginning, as we have seen), but declared the purpose for which He had created them. This is made most evident from comparing verse 6, which speaks of God bringing into existence an expanse that had not been there before, and verse 14, which speaks of God's command concerning the heavenly bodies that had been there from the beginning. While the text in verse six clearly says that God brought about an expanse that had not been there before, in verse 14 the syntax is different—which suggests that God is doing something other than bringing about what had not been there before.

Sailhamer writes that the "Hebrew verbal construction in verse 14 is significantly different from verse 6" even though our English translations don't always reflect that difference. In the Hebrew text of verse 14, God does not say, 'Let there be lights in the expanse to separate the day and night...' as if there were no lights before His command and afterward they came into being [which is the way it was with the expanse in verse 6]. Rather according to the Hebrew text, God said, 'Let the lights in the expanse be for separating the day and night...' God's command, in other words, assumes that the lights already exist in the expanse. To be sure, there has been no mention of these 'lights' earlier in Genesis 1, but their existence is assumed in the expression 'heavens and earth' in Gen 1:1. (131-132).

Thus, on the fourth day God was not creating the sun and stars, but stating the purpose for which he had already created them "in the beginning"—to provide light on the land for man and to be measurements for keeping time. It is amazing that God had His purpose for man in mind eons earlier when He created these heavenly bodies!

But weren't the heavenly bodies already providing light before the fourth day and already capable of marking time before then? If so, isn't it kind of superfluous for God to declare His purpose for them on day four? Sailhamer explains certainly it is true that the sun, moon, and stars were already marking the day and night. Potentially, at least, they were fit to mark the seasons, days, and years. But just as the significance of the rainbow was given long after it had been created (Genesis 9:13), so also God announced His purpose for creating the sun, moon, and stars, on the fourth day—long after they had been created....

The fact that God announced the purpose for the lights on the fourth day does not mean they had not already been performing that purpose since 'the beginning.' The point of the narrative is to show that God waited until the fourth day to explain His purpose for creating the sun, moon, and stars in 'the beginning' (134, 135).

But why, Sailhamer asks, did God wait until the fourth day to declare His purpose in making the celestial bodies? There are two reasons. First, Moses "is intent on showing that the whole world depends on the word of God. The world owes not merely its existence to the word of God, but also its order and purpose" (134). The second reason "lies in the overall structure of the creation account" (135). As we saw above, there is a "parallel relationship between the events of the first three days and the last three days" (135). On the first set of three days, God focuses on the sky (days one and two), then the seas (day three), and then the dry ground (days three and four). On the second set of three days, God again focuses on the sky (days four and five), then the seas (day five), and then the dry ground (day six). Thus, Sailhamer writes that

Having prepared, in consecutive order, the skies, the seas, and the land on the first three days, God, on the last three days, proclaimed the purpose for those things which were to fill the skies, the seas, and the land.

God waited, therefore, until the fourth day to make known His plan for the signs that were to fill the skies (135).

After declaring his purpose for the celestial bodies in verse 14-15, Moses goes on to say “And God made the two great lights...He made the stars also” (v. 16). Sailhamer writes that this verse “looks back to God’s creating ‘the universe’ in Genesis 1:1. Verse 16 could be translated, ‘So God (and not anyone else) made the lights and put them in the sky.’ This does not say when God created ‘the lights,’ but given the overall meaning of Genesis 1:1, it is naturally assumed that they were created ‘in the beginning’” (134).

Day five. On the fifth day God populated the sky and seas that he had prepared on day two with birds and sea creatures. As with the celestial bodies, these creatures had already been created “in the beginning.” But since the land had been a deserted wilderness up until this point, God had to bring forth these creatures to populate the land. The Hebrew expression translated “Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures” in Genesis 1:20 is also found in Exodus 8:3 to describe the filling of the Nile with frogs when Moses stretched forth his staff. Clearly this expression in Exodus 8:3 does not mean that God created frogs for the first time at that point. Rather, it means that He populated the Nile with them. Likewise, the expression in Genesis 1:20 need not mean that God created the sea creatures for the first time on day five. In light of Genesis 1:1, we must understand it to mean that God was populating “the promised land with the various creatures that were created ‘in the beginning’” (141).

Day six. Finally, on the sixth day God populated the ground he had made dry on the third day with living creatures. And it is important to remember that the purpose of God’s commands for the living creatures to fill the sky, ground, and sea “is not the creation of various animals over all the earth, but the specific task of populating the land He is preparing for mankind” (139).

But this raises a problem when it comes to the creation of human beings. Since Genesis 1:1 teaches that God created the universe and all it contains (such as the species of animals which populate the land on day six) “in the beginning,” it would seem that humans also were created at this time and thus existed before God created Adam and Eve on the sixth day. Sailhamer, however, rightly points out that Genesis makes clear that humans are excepted from what God created “in the beginning.” This is because, among other reasons, no genealogies in Genesis go back before Adam, but instead presuppose that he was the first man. Also, Eve is referred to as “the mother of all the living,” which suggests that all humans are ultimately descendants of her.

How long were the days?

At this point one may wonder whether Sailhamer believes the days of Genesis 1 to be twenty-four hour periods, or “ages.” While he does not deal with this question in great detail, he does believe the six days to be twenty-four hour periods. There is good evidence for this understanding, especially since the days are marked off by evening and morning.

However, there are also good reasons to believe that the six days are intended by Moses to be understood as ages of unspecified duration. On this view, the “evening and morning” is understood metaphorically. In my article, “Does the Bible Teach a Young Earth,” I set forth the evidence for this view. While this evidence is persuasive to my mind at this point in time, I am nonetheless open to the understanding that the days are intended to be twenty-four hour periods.

It should be pointed out, however, that the position one adopts as to the length of the days has no bearing on whether Sailhamer’s view is correct. If the days are twenty-four hour periods, then God prepared the Promised Land in six solar days. If the days are actually ages, then there would be no problem in affirming that God prepared the Promised Land over a period of six ages of unspecified length. Either view of the days works with historical creationism.

The Land of Genesis 1-2 is the Promised Land

Now that we have seen that Genesis 1:2ff. is about the preparation of a particular land for man's inhabitation and not the creation of the entire universe or planet, we are in a position to ask, "What is the identity of this land?"

As we saw above, Genesis 2 is an account of the same events as Genesis 1 from a more specific perspective.[4] Thus, since Genesis 2 concerns the land which contained the Garden of Eden, it follows that the land of Genesis 1 is the land in which God placed the Garden of Eden. But the answer goes even deeper than this. Sailhamer makes a solid case that the land in Genesis 1 is specifically the Promised Land. The Garden of Eden was located in the same land that God promised to give to the descendants of Abraham, and it is the preparation of this land that we are told about in Genesis 1. To establish this, I will set forth many of the arguments Sailhamer gives together with some of my own that I have discovered in my examination of the Scriptures.

The borders are the same

First, the boundaries of the land prepared for Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:10-14) are the same as the boundaries of the promised land (Genesis 15:18). This means that the promised land is the land that had been originally prepared for Adam and Eve. Sailhamer summarizes this well: The garden of Eden extended from the 'river that flows through all the land of Cush [the Gihon] ' to the 'River Euphrates.' Since in Genesis the land of Cush is linked to Egypt (Genesis 10:6), the second river, the Gihon (Genesis 2:13), was apparently understood by the author as 'the river of Egypt'....

When we move to Genesis 15, we find that the land promised to Abraham-the promised land-is marked off by these same two rivers, the Euphrates and the River of Egypt (Genesis 15:18)....When the general boundaries are compared, it becomes clear that the writer of the Pentateuch intends us to identify the two locations with each other. God's promise of the land to the patriarchs is thus textually linked to His original 'blessing' of all humanity in the garden of Eden (72).

What is even more astounding is that, since the land originally prepared for Adam and Eve was the land later promised to Abraham, "the events of [Genesis 1-3] foreshadow the events of the remainder of the Pentateuch" and Old Testament (15). In Genesis 1-3, God prepared a land for His people, Adam and Eve, and gave it to them on condition that they would obey him. They disobey and are thus expelled from the Garden. Later, God promises to Abraham's descendants a land, and gives it to them upon condition that they obey him. But, as the Pentateuch predicts, they eventually disobey and, like Adam and Eve, are banished. Not until God brings forth the New Covenant will God's people finally be restored to the land, remain faithful to God, and therefore remain safe in the land forever.

The locations with respect to "the east" are the same

The fact that judgment is represented by going east from both the Garden of Eden and the promised land indicates that they are the same land. In the author's mind, the Garden and Promised Land seem to represent the blessing of a homeland because they are prepared as places where His people would dwell in blessing and peace. Likewise, east of the Garden and Promised Land seems to represent the judgment of exile from a homeland because it is to the east that God exiled both Adam and Israel for disobedience (Genesis 3:24; Jeremiah 52:12-16). Thus, it would seem that the parallel the author of the Pentateuch is drawing is intended to show that the Garden and Promised Land are the same land because they were both prepared as homelands for God's people, and exile from both takes one to the east.

This can be made even more evident. The city of Babylon, which is to the east of the promised land and is where Israel was exiled to, has a reputation in the Bible for wickedness and judgment. It gained this reputation in Genesis 11 because it was built out of humanity's prideful desire to make a name for

themselves (Genesis 11:4). It retained this reputation until the end (Revelation 17). Likewise, the Promised Land has a reputation in the Bible for purity and blessing. It has this reputation because it is where God desires to plant His faithful people and make them prosper if they obey and keep themselves pure (Deuteronomy 30:16). The contrasting reputations of Babylon and the Promised Land help us see why God blesses His people by keeping them in the land when they keep themselves pure through obedience, and judges His people by removing them from the land when they make themselves impure through disobedience.

What is significant here is that, like the Promised Land, the land God prepared for Adam and Eve was a land for their blessing if they remained pure. And just as Babylon is the specific city which is to the east of the Promised Land, so also Babylon was built when humanity moved east from the land that is the focus of Genesis 1-11. In Genesis 11:1 we read “the whole earth used the same language and the same words.” “Whole earth” here doesn’t mean the entire planet, but “whole land” because verse two speaks of them journeying east. It would indeed be odd for this verse to read “And it came about as they [the whole planet] journeyed east, that they [the whole planet] found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.” Thus, it seems that “whole earth” in 11:1 is best understood as “whole land.”

But what land is the author speaking of? It seems it is the land that had been prepared for man in Genesis 1 and 2 because it appears Genesis 11 is intended as a parallel to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden. Just as they sinned and were cast out eastward, so also the people of the land traveled eastward to manifest their sin by making a name for themselves. Thus, it seems that the author here understands Babylon to be east of the land God had originally prepared for Adam and Eve. Since Babylon is also the city which is east of the Promised Land, it seems that the Promised Land is the land that had originally been prepared for Adam and Eve.

The entrances to both the Garden and the Promised Land were guarded by an angel

Next, it is significant that the entrance to both the Garden of Eden and the Promised Land is guarded by an angel. When Adam and Eve were cast out, God stationed at the east of Eden a “cherubim....to guard the way to the tree of life” (3:24). Likewise, when Jacob returned to the promised land from the east he was met by angels of God (Genesis 32:1-2), and finally had to wrestle with an angel in order to reenter the land (32:22-32). Finally, Joshua also encountered angels as he entered the promised land (Joshua 5:13-15). It is hard to escape the notion that the author marked the exit of the Garden of Eden and the entrance of the Promised Land with an angel to show that to enter the Promised Land is to “return to Eden.” Thus, God’s giving of the Promised Land to Israel aims at restoring humanity to His original purposes for us.

Jeremiah 4:23-26 sees the promised land in Genesis 1

Jeremiah 4:23-26 refers to the state of the promised land after God’s judgment on Israel for their sins, which involved destroying the land and casting Israel away from the land into exile. That this verse is about the promised land is evident from the context, which concerns the destruction that God is bringing upon the land where Israel dwells--not the whole planet. Thus, due to the context, “earth” in this passage must mean “promised land.”

What is astounding here is that the description of the promised land in Jeremiah 4:23-26 after it had been destroyed on account of man parallels the description of “the land” in Genesis 1:2 before it had been prepared for man: “I looked on the earth, and behold, it was formless and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light” (Jeremiah 4:23). “And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep...Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Genesis 1:2-3).

The phrase translated as “formless and void” in Jeremiah 4:23 is the same phrase translated as “formless and void” in Genesis 1:2. This is a striking parallel, especially when we recognize that in both passages the phrase is used to describe “the earth.” Further, like the promised land in Jeremiah 4:23, the land in Genesis

1:2 is also said to be dark. The difference is that when God prepared the land for Adam and Eve it went from dark to light, but when He exiled Israel from “the land” it went from light to dark. The exile of Israel from the land was a reversal of the preparation of the land for Adam and Eve.

Further, Jeremiah 4:25 announces that after God’s judgment on Israel the promised land was deserted: “I looked, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled.” Likewise, before the land of Genesis 1:2 had been prepared for man, it was deserted. When God seeks to bless man in the land, the land is made fruitful (cf. Isaiah 35:1-10; 51:3; Ezekiel 36:35; Genesis 1:2-2:1). But when man sins and brings down God’s curse, he is exiled from the land and the land is made into a wilderness like it was before it had been prepared for man: “I looked, and behold, the fruitful land was a wilderness” (v 26; cf. Genesis 3:17-19, 24).

Thus, since the land in Jeremiah 4:23-26 is the promised land, it is likely that, due to the parallels with Genesis 1:2, the land in Genesis 1:2 is also the promised land. It seems that, by alluding to Genesis 1:2, Jeremiah is trying to highlight the tragedy of Israel’s sin by pointing out that the judgment of God on Israel for their sins puts the promised land back into the state it was before it had even been prepared for man. Israel’s sin is a great tragedy because it resulted in their homeland being made as if there were no humans to bless--just as there were no humans to bless yet in Genesis 1:2. The expulsion of Israel from the Promised Land is a reversal of the preparation of the land for Adam and Eve.

It is also significant to note that just as before Adam and Eve inhabited the Garden it was a “wilderness” (Genesis 1:2), Israel’s time of waiting to enter the promised land is depicted as a wandering in the “wilderness” (Deuteronomy 32:10). As Sailhamer draws out, “God’s people must go through the wilderness to reach the promised land. Likewise, when Israel disobeyed and was expelled from the land, it once again became ‘uninhabitable’ (tohu) (Jeremiah 4:23-26)” (65).

Jeremiah 27:5 sees the Promised Land in Genesis 1

Jeremiah 27:5 also understands Genesis 1 as an account of the preparation of the promised land. In this verse, which scholars generally recognize as a reference to the account of Genesis 1, God says, “I have made the earth, the men and the beasts which are on the face of the earth by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and I will give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight.”

First, it is evident from the statement “I have made the earth” that this verse is a reference to the events of Genesis 1 and 2, for that is the account where God makes the earth. Second, we know that this passage “refers to Gen 1:2-2:4a and not Genesis 1:1” because “Jeremiah used the Hebrew term “to make” (asah) and not the term “to create” (bara).” (54). Thus, this passage is not a reference to the creation (bara) of the heavens and earth (Genesis 1:1), but to the preparation (asah) of “the earth” (Genesis 1:2ff).

Third, “the earth” here is not a reference to the whole planet, but to the promised land. This is evident from the context. In verses 3-4, God tells Jeremiah to have a message sent to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon. The content of this message, which begins in verse 5 and continues through verse 14, is basically that their lands will be given to Nebuchadnezzar and that they must submit to him. Because of the false prophets who are saying that they will not have to serve the king of Babylon (vv. 9-10), God establishes at the beginning of the message the reason He has the authority to give their lands over to Nebuchadnezzar (v. 5). The reason He gives is that He “made the land” and therefore “will give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight.” Thus, it seems that since verse five establishes the reason God has the authority to give the land of the kings mentioned in verse three to Nebuchadnezzar, the “land” mentioned in verse three is the land where the kings listed in verse three reside. And a brief glance at a Bible map reveals that that land is the promised land.

This case is strengthened by verse six where God identifies the land that he spoke of in verse five with the land that He was going to give to Nebuchadnezzar. Whereas verse five established the right God has to give

“the land” to whoever He wants, verse six says that God actually is going to give “the land” to Nebuchadnezzar. Thus, the land spoken of in verse six appears to be the same land which God said He “made” in verse five. And the land spoken of in verse six, which he was about to give to Nebuchadnezzar, was the “lands” of Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon. All of these “lands,” as we mentioned above, are actually “lands” within the promised land. Thus, the land of verse six that God is going to give to Nebuchadnezzar (and therefore the land of verse five, which is the land God prepared in Genesis 1) is the land of Ammon, Tyre, Sidon, Edom, and Moab, which is the promised land. Further, we know from later biblical history (such as Jeremiah 52:12-16) that the land which God gave to Nebuchadnezzar was specifically the Promised Land, for he was the rod of God’s judgment used to remove Israel from their land for disobedience. Thus, when Jeremiah 27:5 looks back on the events of Genesis one, it sees them as an account of the preparation of the promised land.

Exodus 20:11 sees the Promised Land in Genesis 1

It is becoming apparent that “later interbiblical interpretation clearly saw the promised land as the focus of the creation account” (53). Exodus 20:11 is yet another verse which understands the six days of Genesis 1 as a reference to the preparation of the promised land: “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day...”

It might first appear that the opposite is the case, for doesn’t the term “heavens and earth,” as we saw earlier, refer to the entire universe? And doesn’t this verse say that God created the “heavens and the earth” in six days, not an unspecified period of time? If this was the case, it would clearly mean that the six days of Genesis 1 are the account of God’s creation of the entire universe and not preparation of the promised land as I maintain.

Exodus 20:11 does not teach that the entire universe is the scope of God’s work in the six days of Genesis 1. Sailhamer resolves the apparent difficulty raised by the reference to the “heavens and the earth” in Exodus 20:11 very well. He writes: “...this passage in Exodus does not use the merism ‘heavens and earth’ to describe God’s work of six days. Rather, it gives us a list of God’s distinct works during the six days....That list refers to God’s work in Genesis 1:2-2:4, not to His creation of the universe in Genesis 1:1. Exodus 20:11 does not say God created ‘the heavens and earth’ in six days; it says God made three things in six days—the sky, the land, and the seas—and then filled them during that same period (106).

Thus, Exodus 20:11 does not state that the six days concern the entire universe, but the “sky, the land, the sea, and all that is in them.” It is interesting that the list of four things in Ex 20:11 corresponds exactly to what God made in Gen 1:2ff. First, he prepared the sky. Then He prepared the seas. And then He prepared the ground. This was the first three days. This corresponds to the statement that “in six days the Lord made [not the heavens and the earth, but] the heavens, the earth, the sea...” In the remaining three days, he filled these three things. This corresponds to the statement that after preparing the sky, the land, and the sea God made “all that is in them.”

Exodus 20:11 does not see the six days of Genesis 1 as creation, but as preparation. So we see that Exodus 20:11 is not stating that God’s creation of the entire universe occurred over a six day period, but that his work on the sky, ground, and sea occurred over a six day period. That this is a reference to the preparation of the sky, land, and sea for man and not their creation is evident from their use of the word “made” and not “created.” The word “created” is used in Genesis 1:1. But the word “made,” which is used here, means the same as the English expression ‘to make’ a bed. Elsewhere in the Bible the same Hebrew word is used to describe cutting one’s fingernails (deut 21:12), washing one’s feet (2 Samuel 19:25), and trimming one’s beard (2 Samuel 19:24)...The word means to put something in good order, to make it right. Thus, Ex 20 actually seems to support the view that Gen 1:2ff. refers to the preparation, not creation, of the land.

Exodus 20:11 sees the scope of God’s work in the six days of Genesis 1 as the Promised Land. Having seen, then, that Exodus 20:11 does not see the six days of Genesis 1 as the creation of the universe but the

preparation of the sky, sea, and ground, the question becomes whether the text specifically identifies the location of God's work during these six days as the Promised Land. That it does is evident by comparing it with Jeremiah 27:5 (which we will see also strengthens our case that Jeremiah 27:5 is a reference to the promised land).

After commanding Israel to keep the Sabbath in Exodus 20:8-10, God then gives the reason in verse 11: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day..." The next commandment, given in verse 12, is to honor one's father and mother. And the reason for this commandment is "that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you." The "land which the Lord your God gives you" is by definition the promised land.

So we see that the command to keep the Sabbath is based on the fact that God is the one who made the sky, land, and ground. And we also see that the keeping of the command to honor one's father and mother is to be motivated by the fact that God is the one who gives the promised land to whom He wants. So what land is at the foundation of the command for a Sabbath rest? Most likely, the same land that lies at the foundation of the next command to honor one's father and mother—namely, "the land which the Lord your God gives you," which is the promised land. In other words, the sky, seas, and ground of verse 11 are those of the promised land which is referred to in verse 12.

The correlation in Jeremiah 27:5 between God's preparing the land and God's giving the land is significant: "I have made the land...and I will give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight." This seems to be the same correlation we find in Exodus 20:11-12. God prepared the land (v. 11) and God gives the land (v. 12). Like Jeremiah 27:5, Exodus 20:11-12 stresses that God made the land, and God gives the land. Thus, if one of these passages is referring to the promised land, it seems that the other must be as well.

The Theme of the Pentateuch reveals the land to be the focus in Genesis 1:2ff

The word translated "earth" in 1:2 (*eretz*) not only normally means "land" instead of the whole planet (as we have already seen), but "usually refers specifically to the land promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18)" (50). It seems that a reader familiar with the theme of the Pentateuch would naturally understand "land" in this sense in Genesis 1:2 because "the central theme of the Pentateuch is the Sinai Covenant and God's gift of the land" (52).

And if the "land" in verse two is the promised land, then it follows that the six days of creation are the account of God's activity on this same land because, as we saw above, verse two "sets the stage for the account of God's actions in the remainder of the chapter. It turns the reader's attention away from the universe as a whole and onto the promised land, which is the central setting of the remainder of the Pentateuch" (109). "Unfortunately," he writes elsewhere, "by not rendering *eretz* in Genesis 1:1-2 as 'land,' our English translations have blurred the connection of these early verses of Genesis to the central theme of the land in the Pentateuch" (52).

To make this argument more firm, two things must be made more evident. First, we must show why, if the central theme of the Pentateuch is the giving of the land, it would lead one to conclude that it is this same land that is referred to in verse two. Second, we must establish that the giving of the land is indeed the central theme of the Pentateuch.

How the theme of the Pentateuch uncovers the meaning of Genesis 1:2. First, the reason a reader familiar with the central theme of the Pentateuch as the giving of the promised land would see the "land" mentioned in 1:2 as the promised land is because Genesis 1-3 "present a general description of the world in which the subsequent historical events will take place. They set the stage" for the events of the remainder of the Pentateuch (81).

These chapters set the stage for the remainder of the chapter because, at the end of the sixth day, Adam and Eve have been provided with a homeland. This is obvious whether or not one views chapters one and two as a reference to the promised land. But the concept of a homeland for God's people is at the center of both the Covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15:18) and the Covenant made at Sinai (Deut 5:32-33). So the concept of a "homeland" is a central concern of the three major events of the Pentateuch: Creation, the Abrahamic Covenant, and the Exodus and Sinai Covenant. Since the same homeland is in view in these later two events-the Abrahamic Covenant and Sinai Covenant-it would naturally follow that the same homeland is also in view in the creation account.

In other words, it would naturally follow that the creation account is setting the context in which to understand the other two major events that concern a "homeland"-especially since had man not lost his homeland to begin with he would not need to be provided with a homeland through the covenant with Abraham and the covenant at Sinai. Thus, Sailhamer draws out the relationship between the events of creation and the theme of the Sinai covenant as the giving of a land for God's people upon the condition that they obey:

Each of these central themes of the Sinai Covenant finds its initial statement in the opening chapters of Genesis. The Covenant is grounded in the events of creation. The author for Genesis 1 wants to show that the stretch of land which God promised to give Israel in the Sinai Covenant-the land where Abraham and his family sojourned, the land of Canaan-was the same land God had prepared for them at the time of creation. It was in that land that God first blessed mankind and called upon men and women to obey him. It was in that land that the Tree of Life once grew and God provided for man's good and kept him from evil. In the narrative of Genesis 1, we are thus given an account of God's original purposes with humanity (83).

Second, a reader would familiar with the theme of the Pentateuch would understand "the land" in verse two as the promised land because the same process that leads to this understanding of "the land" in verse two is intended to lead to the proper understanding of "God" in verse one.

Like "the land" in verse two, "God" in verse one is left largely undefined. We understand what the author means by God in verse one largely from our understanding of what we are told about God in the rest of the Bible. So just as the reader is to fill the word "God" in 1:1 with the meaning that is given this word throughout the Pentateuch, so also it seems that the author intends that we understand the "land" in verse in light of the central theme of the Pentateuch. The mention of God in verse one would prompt the question, "Who is that?" The answer is clearly, "The One who is the central focus of the rest of the book of Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch." This would prompt the realization that God is not only God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but also God of all creation. Likewise, the mention of "the land" in verse two would prompt the question "Which land?" And the answer would likewise seem to be, "The one that is the central focus of the rest of the book of Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch." This, then, would prompt the realization that when God promised a land to Abraham and his descendants, it was not the first time God had sought to bless mankind in a land. Rather, God was taking action to establish one of His original goals in creation.

The giving of the Promised Land is a central theme of the Pentateuch. From these two reasons it is evident why, if a central theme of the Pentateuch is the giving of the land, a reader familiar with this would, at the author's design, understand the "land" in Genesis 1:2ff as the Promised Land. That the Promised Land is a central theme of the Pentateuch is evident from the fact that the two main covenants with which the storyline of the Pentateuch focuses on-the Abrahamic and Sinai Covenants-have the giving of the Promised Land at their center. Thus, it seems that the author intends that a reader familiar with the theme of the Pentateuch see the "land" in Genesis 1:2 as the Promised Land.

The Glorious Unifying Function of the Land

For all of these reasons, it seems solid to conclude that historical creationism is correct. Genesis 1:1 declares that God created the entire universe in a period of time that is left unspecified. Genesis 1:2 shifts the focus from the universe as a whole to the Promised Land at some point after God had finished creating the universe. The six days of Genesis one, therefore, are the account of God preparing the Promised Land for mankind.

This reveals that one of the main aims of the author in Genesis one and two is to establish that the God of the covenant is the God of creation. The God who prepared the land promised in the covenant (1:2ff) is the same God who created the universe (1:1). Therefore, the members of the covenant have a mighty God who is above all other gods.

By making the connection--by means of the land--between creation and the covenants, Genesis one through two not only call attention to the greatness of God, but also set the stage for what the rest of the Bible has to say about the greatness of God. Because the land is not only a unifying theme among the covenants, but also what unifies the covenants with creation (because they all concern the same land), there is a deeper unity among God's purposes in creation and redemption. When we see this, a glorious tapestry of God's mighty works in the Bible unfolds before our eyes.

In an attempt to behold this glory, I will rehearse the main events God used to bring Israel to the Promised Land. Doing so will not only highlight the glorious implications the centrality of the land in both creation and redemption has, but will also serve to confirm our conclusion that the giving of the land is a central theme of the Pentateuch.

The Covenant with Abraham and the Land Promised in it is Central to the Story of the Pentateuch

This is evident from a general knowledge of salvation history. God calls Abraham out of his land of idolatry (Genesis 12:1) to bless him so that he will be a blessing (v. 2) and as a means to this promises to make him a great nation (Genesis 12:2). This promise is initially fulfilled in the creation of the earthly nation of Israel from Abraham's descendants, who serve as the main characters in the Pentateuch from Genesis 12 on. In addition to this, the promise of a land was a key element of the covenant (Genesis 12:1, 7)-which is evident from the fact that from Genesis 12 to Deuteronomy 32 the main story concerns how God brought Israel to this land.

The means God used to bring Israel into the land promised to them is an intricate story which reveals God's wisdom and what His ultimate goal in the Abrahamic covenant is. When God originally made the covenant with Abraham, he informed him that before his earthly descendants would be blessed of God in the promised land, they would first "be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years" (Genesis 15:13).

This prophecy was not merely a prediction of what would happen, but a declaration of what God would do. This is evident from the events that followed. When Abraham's grandson Jacob, through which the nation of Israel was to come, had descendants numbering about seventy, God brought about a severe famine in the land as the means of positioning Israel in Egypt. Having already sent Joseph to Egypt far ahead of time as the means of maintaining a great reserve of food so that many would be preserved alive (Genesis 50:20), God used the famine to bring the other descendants of Jacob to join Joseph in Egypt because Egypt is where the food was that God had provided to keep them alive. It is striking to realize that God did this, and even told them to go (Genesis 46:3), even though He had already said that they would eventually become slaves in the land (Genesis 15:13; Exodus 1:11). The implication is that Israel's slavery in Egypt was orchestrated by God to put Israel in a place to behold the mighty works of God on their behalf.

The Sinai Covenant Sought to Bring Israel into the Land Promised in the Abrahamic Covenant

Thus, God did not forget His promise to bring the nation of Israel to the Promised Land. He still remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob after four hundred years (Exodus 2:24) and raised up Moses to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt and bring them into the promised land (Exodus 3:8). After bringing Israel out of Egypt, he made a covenant with them which centered on the book of the law (Exodus 22:7-8) and in which, as Sailhamer writes, He “vowed to give them the ‘land’ He had promised to their forefathers. He promised to bless them in that land, to give them rest and peace, and ultimately to dwell with them in that land.”

Thus, the giving of the land was a central promise of the Sinai (or Old) Covenant (Deuteronomy 1:5-8). That the land is central to the Sinai Covenant is also shown by the fact that Israel’s obedience to the law given in that covenant was “the only condition God placed on their enjoyment of the land. If they disobeyed, Israel would be cast out of the land and go into exile (Deuteronomy 4:25-26).” But if they obeyed, they would live long in the land (Deuteronomy 30:16-20). The problem with the Old Covenant was that Israel did not have renewed hearts that wanted to obey God (Deuteronomy 29:4). Thus, eventually Israel was persistently disobedient and thus cast out of the land. This is the same reason that Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden (Genesis 3).

The New Covenant Established the Aim of the Abrahamic Covenant and Secures Us in the Land

So the Old Covenant was not enough to keep Israel in the land because it was not able to be fulfilled due to the hardness of the human heart. This did not, however, abort God’s purpose to give the descendants of Abraham the land. Instead, it revealed what God’s true purpose was all along in the Sinai Covenant—to show our sinfulness so that we would see the need for the New Covenant.

That the Sinai covenant was not the Covenant that God intended to use to bring the promise of blessing and a land for Abraham’s descendants to ultimate fulfillment is evident from Galatians 3, which teaches that the blessing of Abraham is salvation through Christ, and that it is through the Abrahamic Covenant, not the Sinai Covenant, that this blessing comes to us (Galatians 3:8, 17-18). The Sinai covenant was a servant to the Abrahamic covenant because it was our “tutor” to show us our sinfulness and thus lead us to justification by faith in Christ, who was the seed of Abraham (3:24). As such, it was only ever intended to be temporary and a means to demonstrating the supremacy of the Abrahamic Covenant which had been made before it (3:15-19).

The Abrahamic Covenant, then, is not fulfilled by the Old Covenant. Rather, the Old Covenant was intended to point to another Covenant—a Covenant in which the Abrahamic Covenant would be fulfilled. This New Covenant is not explicitly mentioned in the Pentateuch, but is foreshadowed in the fact that the Sinai covenant is predicted to fail at keeping Israel in the land (Deuteronomy 31:14-22). After this failure came to pass, the New Covenant was promised in the books of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah.

Looking back on the failure of the Old Covenant, which was made with ethnic Israel, and the success of the New Covenant, which was made not with ethnic Israel but those who believe in Christ and aims at fulfilling the promise made to Abraham, much light is shed on exactly what God was promising in the Abrahamic Covenant. First, we see that the true descendants of Abraham are not those who are physically descended from him, but those who believe in Christ (Galatians 3:7). Thus, God’s promise in the Abrahamic Covenant was not to give all physical descendants of Abraham the land, but to give the land to all of those who, like Abraham, believe in Christ. This is one reason why the failure of the Old Covenant to keep ethnic Israel in the land did not abort God’s purpose in the Abrahamic Covenant.

Second, we see that the land which God aims to give to the spiritual descendants of Abraham is not merely an earthly dwelling, but a heavenly dwelling. The land promised to Abraham is not merely a section of land that is of this creation, it is a section of land that we will possess in the new creation—that is, once the heavens and the earth are renewed! The promised land is the land that God originally prepared for Adam

and Eve. But it is that land as it will be once God renews this creation from the effects of the fall and joins heaven and earth together as one (Revelation 21-22).

To see this, notice the parallels between the elements of God's covenant to Abraham in Genesis 17, and the elements of the New Covenant stated in Jeremiah 32. The New Covenant contains the same promises as those of the Abrahamic covenant because it is the true fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. But by seeing how the promise to Abraham concerning the land is interpreted in the promises of the New Covenant, a flood of light is shed on the land God had actually promised in the Abrahamic Covenant.

The covenant with Abraham. "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojourning, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Genesis 17:7-8).

The New Covenant. "And they shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good, and for the good of their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me. And I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul" (Jeremiah 32:40-41).

The first passage above concerns God's covenant with Abraham: "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants." The second passage concerns the New Covenant: "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them." This is the covenant spoken about in Jeremiah 31:31-32 of which God says, "Behold, days are coming...when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand out of Egypt, My covenant which they broke." The New Covenant, then, replaces the Old Covenant (cf. Hebrews 8), but does not replace the Abrahamic Covenant because, like the New Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant is said to be eternal. What this means is that the New Covenant is the fulfillment, or perhaps reaffirmation, of the Abrahamic Covenant. Therefore, we should expect that they include the same promises. This is exactly what we see in these texts.

In both Covenants, God promises that the descendants of Abraham (which we know from Galatians 3 to be Christians, not ethnic Jews) will be His people and that He will be their God. That the New Covenant is made with the descendants of Abraham is evident from Jeremiah 31, which says the New Covenant is made "with the house of Israel and the house of Judah." Notice also that these two covenants are not only both made with the descendants of Abraham, but both contain the promise of the land.

The New Covenant as it is expressed in Jeremiah 32 explains how it is that God will keep us faithful to His covenant so that we will never be expelled from the land, as happened to Israel under the Old Covenant. God will keep us faithful because He will put the fear of Himself in our hearts so that we will not turn away from Him. And He promises to never turn away from us. This is what the Old Covenant lacked—the power to follow God. But the power that the Old Covenant did not give is given by the New Covenant. Therefore, the Old Covenant did not keep ethnic Israel in the land, but the New Covenant will keep spiritual Israel in the land forever.

Finally, the expression of the New Covenant in Jeremiah sheds fuller light on the identity of the land God had promised to Abraham. Notice that it is the same land promised to Abraham that God promises once again to plant His spiritual descendants in. But from the revelation of the New Testament, we know that God is not merely going to give Christians the land of Israel. Rather, we know that He is going to renew the entire universe, the "heavens and the earth," cleansing it from all wickedness and making all things new. Thus, the "land" that God promises to give us forever in Jeremiah 32 is the promised land as it will be in the New Heavens and New Earth. This is the dwelling God promises to give Christians. And since the New Covenant

brings to fulfillment the Abrahamic Covenant, they both have the same land in view. Thus, the land promised to Abraham is the land from the Euphrates to River of Egypt as it will be in the Renewed Heavens and Earth! God's plan to restore His people in the renewed heavens and earth to the land they had lost at creation was already revealed way back in His promise to Abraham!

The Deep Unity of God's Plans

What does all this show? It shows that God's purposes remain the same from creation through redemption and into the new creation. God's purposes have never changed and will be established. And the foundation of this truth is laid in Genesis one. "By establishing a connection between the promised land and the garden of Eden, the Genesis narratives reveal something quite important about God and His purposes in creation. They tell us that God's purposes remain the same. What He has accomplished in creation He will do again in His covenant promises" (p. 73). The author of Genesis accomplishes this in showing "that the Sinai Covenant and God's call of Abraham have as their ultimate goal the establishment of God's original purposes in creation. God intended from the beginning that His people find blessing and peace in 'the land' He provided for them" (p. 84).

This ties together in greater unity the covenants of redemption with the original state of man and his consequent fall from that state. When mankind fell from fellowship with God, God took action to redeem man and restore Him to the land through His covenants. The covenants seek to redeem man from His fall by bringing God's redeemed people back into the land which he had lost in his fall in a renewed creation!

The first thing we read of in the Bible is God's creation of the entire universe. The next thing we read is that, after the universe was finished, the land God had destined for Adam and Eve was a deserted wilderness (Genesis 1:2). God then prepared this special land for mankind to dwell in, but they soon fell from a right relationship with God through disobedience and were exiled from the land.

Thousands of years later, in the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised to restore Abraham's spiritual descendants to this land. After letting Israel be enslaved in Egypt for hundreds of years, God began to fulfill this promise and led them to the land. And just as the land was a deserted wilderness before it had been prepared for Adam and Eve, so also Israel wandered through the wilderness before entering to conquer (prepare?) the land (Deuteronomy 32:10).

The Old Covenant thus brought God's people back to the land for a time, but soon resulted in a repetition of what happened to mankind the first time he had been given the land. Israel sinned persistently against God and was thus exiled from the land, to the east, in judgment-just as had happened to Adam and Eve. The fall of man in Genesis 3, thus, foreshadowed what would happen in the Old Covenant. Hence, we see that God's plan for the Old Covenant was to point the way to the New Covenant by showing that a mighty work of God on our hearts is necessary for our salvation.

In this New Covenant, then, which was purchased by Christ's death, God is bringing to infallible fulfillment the promise to Abraham that had not been successfully fulfilled by the Old Covenant. And that promise to Abraham was God's promise to restore Abraham's descendants to the land they had lost in the fall.

The unity God has established between creation and redemption, by means of the Promised Land, truly magnifies the riches of his wisdom and the inscrutability of his ways. And by understanding the rich history of the Promised Land not only in redemption, but creation as well, the land where we are heading as Christians and where we will worship Christ in the renewed heavens and earth (Isaiah 2:1-4; 66:18-24) takes on a much more profound and fascinating significance.

Notes

1. See his excellent defense of this affirmation in Appendix 1, pp. 227-245.
2. See my article, "The Days of Creation" for a summary of the evidence for an old earth.
3. I recognize that these categories may be too rigid. But I think that they do, in general, demonstrate the structure of the passage.
4. Sailhamer writes, "It is likely that the author intended a connection to be drawn between God's furnishing the land with fruit trees in chapter 1 [verses 9-11] and His furnishing the garden with trees 'good for food' in chapter 2. This is yet another clue that the two accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 are indeed about the same work of creation and that the 'land' of chapter 1 should be understood as the 'garden' of chapter 2" (127).

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