

4. 10:1-11:9 The offspring of Noah's sons
5. 11:10-26 The offspring of Shem
6. 11:27-25:11 The offspring of Terah
7. 25:12-18 The offspring of Ishmael
8. 25:19-35:29 The offspring of Isaac
9. 36:1-37:1 The offspring of Esau (in two parts: 36:1-8;
36:9-37:1)
10. 37:2-50:26 The offspring of Jacob

It is interesting to notice that there are five sections dealing with the pre-patriarchal times and five concerning the patriarchal period. These are the natural divisions of the book which we shall follow in the commentary.

Part 1:
The prologue
(1:1–2:3)

1

The origin of the universe and of life

Please read Genesis 1:1–25

The Prologue to Genesis (1:1–2:3) is a most sublime and stately section. It is not poetry, neither is it a hymn of praise. Rather, it is a moving and powerful statement of God's creative activity which should stir us to worship and adore the great King of creation.¹

God

On Christmas Eve 1968 the crew of the spaceship Apollo 8 became the first humans to orbit the moon. In their Christmas greetings to earth, the astronauts quoted these words: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'

This opening sentence, so simple yet so profound, sets the tone for the whole prologue. It makes us sit up and prepare for what follows. Appropriately, the subject of the first sentence of the Bible and of Genesis is God. He is the subject of nearly every sentence in this first section: 'God said ...', 'God saw ...', 'God divided ...', 'God called ...', 'God made ...', 'God created ...', 'God

set ...', 'God blessed ...' The Bible is first and foremost revelation concerning God. From the very first verse God discloses truth about himself. The term used for 'God' is *Elohim*, the most common word in the Old Testament when referring to the deity. Like our English word 'God', it can be used of pagan gods, but here it is used for the one true and living God, the God who communicates and does things.

The Bible does not set out to prove God. God is bigger than any mathematical calculation or philosophical argument. The very fact of creation bears testimony to the reality of God: 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork' (Psalm 19:1). When Paul took the gospel to the pagan cities of the Roman empire he taught the people to turn from their worthless idols to the living God who made heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them (cf. Acts 14:15; 17:24-31; 1 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

No human being is qualified to speak with certainty on the subject of origins. 'Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding' (Job 38:4). Only God can give authoritative information. This book of Genesis is not the result of some thoughtful person's trying to grapple with the origin of all things and coming up with the great idea that behind everything there is a first cause, or a being above whom no greater can be conceived. Moses could have tossed such ideas around in the Egyptian court with the wise men of his day. But the first chapter of Genesis is not Moses' thoughts on God. Far from it! Here is God speaking through Moses. Moses is a prophet, God's spokesman, declaring God's Word. The verse tells us that there was a commencement to everything—to time and space and the whole universe. Matter is not eternal, as the ancient Babylonians and Greeks thought, and as some scientists

of today postulate. Everything that is in the universe had a beginning, and the universe itself had a beginning.

Before the commencement of all things God was already there. God was there when time began, when the universe began. John, in the opening words of his Gospel, has this verse of Genesis in mind when he writes concerning Jesus Christ: 'In the beginning was the Word ... He was in the beginning with God' (John 1:1-2). By implication, we are being told about God's eternity.

Before the mountains were brought forth,
Or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God
(Psalm 90:2).

We bow in wonder and amazement at the greatness of God.

The creator God

We are also informed that God is the Creator. This whole chapter is about God's creative power. Verse 1 is an introductory, comprehensive statement. It informs us of the origin of all things, as well as summarizing the whole creative process described in the following verses. Before the beginning only God existed.

The phrase 'the heavens and the earth' is often used in the Bible to mean the whole universe and all that is in it. God is the origin of the universe. It teaches us that God is the Creator of the heavenly realm as well as the earthly; of the unseen, spirit world of angelic beings as well as the physical things which we can see. Psalm 148:1-5 includes angels as well as sun, moon and stars under the heading of 'heavens' and calls out: 'Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created.' What is true of God the Father is also true of the Son, Jesus Christ (see John 1:3; Colossians 1:16).

A common belief among 'New Agers' is the ancient idea that God is another term for everything. This belief is known as pantheism. The opening verse of Genesis is contrary to such a notion. The universe is not God. God is quite distinct from what he has made. Though all things have their being in God, God is above all. He remains transcendent and the only self-existent being in the whole universe. Everything that exists depends ultimately on God.

The word translated 'created' is used very sparingly in the Old Testament, and every time it is used, God is the subject. Though the term is not always used for 'creation out of nothing', it is significant that no materials are ever mentioned when it is employed. It is never said that God created *out of* something. The word always refers to what is new, unusual or wonderful. No human, no other so-called god, can create in this sense. Creation is God's work and in this first verse of the Bible the ultimate wonder is clearly implied that the raw material out of which everything exists in the universe was made from nothing. It appeared because God willed it into being. All the other creative acts described in this chapter follow from this initial act.

Our universe, therefore, is not the result of an accident. There was nothing there to have an accident! Human beings in rebellion against God hate the thought that before anything existed there was nothing but God. Does anyone really believe that nothing evolved into something? Our universe did not evolve through chance happenings. Sinful humanity would sooner believe a lie than face up to the reality of God. The Bible's estimate of the human mind is so accurate: 'Although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools ...' (Romans 1:21-22).

Because the universe is the result of God's creative activity people can be assured that there is meaning and purpose to life. Creation is a purposeful act. It is not like an unexpected or unwanted pregnancy. God ordered it and planned it. He created all things for his glory. There is no higher purpose, no greater reason for living. God himself is the highest end, the chief and ultimate goal.

You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honour and power;
For you created all things,
And by your will they exist and were created

(Revelation 4:11).

Earth

A more accurate translation of the opening words of verse 2 would be 'Now the earth ...'² Attention is drawn to the earth. The rest of the chapter deals with items that are in one way or another related to this world. Nothing is said about the creation of spirit beings who belong to the heavenly, invisible realm. There is a very good reason why the text so quickly focuses on the earth. This is where human beings were placed, where they rebelled against God and where God eventually came in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. It was on this earth that the Son of God shed his precious blood to bring us to God. It was here in our world that his body was placed in a tomb and on the third day was resurrected. From earth he ascended bodily into heaven, and it will be to this earth that he will return a second time in great power to judge the living and the dead and to bring in a new creation. Then the earth will be populated with redeemed humanity and God will be as much at home here as he is in heaven.

After the general declaration concerning the creation of the entire universe, we zoom in on the earth and we are told what

it looked like before its transformation into the lovely ordered world that we read of later. The earth 'was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep'. It was a mass of fluid, dark and totally incapable of sustaining life. It was a trackless waste, a great void. Imagine yourself standing on a raft in the middle of the Pacific Ocean on a dark, misty night. That was the kind of state the whole earth was in at first. 'Chaos', when used as the opposite of 'cosmos', is the term to describe the state of the earth at that time. 'Chaos', in this context, is not to be taken in its more popular sense of an absolute mess, or a totally confused, out-of-control state as if a bomb had hit it. 'Cosmos' is the world as a habitable, well-formed place to live. 'Chaos', therefore, in this technical sense, stands for the original unformed state of the earth, unfit for human and animal habitation.

Some have argued that verse 2 is describing the results of a great catastrophe that occurred between the original creation of verse 1 and the situation presented in verse 2. They suggest that it was the result of Satan's fall causing complete devastation on the earth. To further support this idea the beginning of verse 2 is rendered: 'And the earth *became* without form and void.' The 'gap theory', as it is called, uses Jeremiah 4:23, which speaks of the coming judgement in terms of the earth's being 'without form, and void' and the heavens having 'no light' because of the wickedness of the people. This idea was first suggested in the nineteenth century to take account of the evidence of the fossils and the length of time needed for the rock formations. It is a clear case of allowing a particular theory to influence the interpretation and translation of the Scriptures. The passage gives no hint of any satanic rebellion or divine judgement and the Hebrew text does not allow for the force of the verb to be changed from 'was' to 'become'.

The Spirit of God

That things were not out of control or under judgement is confirmed by the phrase: 'And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.' 'Hovering' is found elsewhere in the Old Testament only in Deuteronomy 32:11, where it is used to describe an eagle hovering over her young to keep watch over them, ready to swoop into action if necessary. Here in Genesis, the Spirit of God was present to protect and control, and was ready to act. Some scholars have tried to translate 'Spirit of God' as 'mighty wind'. While it is true that the word for God (*Elohim*) can occasionally be used as a superlative,³ this is unlikely in a chapter where all the other references to *Elohim* refer to God. Furthermore, in every other case where the phrase occurs in the Old Testament, it means 'Spirit of God'. For instance, God says of Bezalel, the master craftsman, 'I have filled him with the Spirit of God' (Exodus 31:3). Not only is the Son of God associated with creation, but also the Spirit of God (Psalm 104:29-30). The Son and the Spirit are also involved in the new creation (John 3:5-8; Romans 7:6; 8:9-11,23; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15).

Notice the parallel between the last two lines. 'On the face of the deep' parallels 'over the face of the waters' and 'darkness' parallels 'Spirit of God'. Darkness is primarily a reference to the lack of light and prepares for the commanding word of verse 3. In some contexts darkness can include a more sinister idea associated with evil or judgement. In view of the parallel with 'Spirit of God', darkness certainly has no such connotations here. When God spoke from Sinai he appeared with darkness, cloud and thick darkness (Deuteronomy 4:11; 5:23). 'God can veil himself in darkness at moments of great revelation,' and the phrase could be hinting 'at the hidden presence of God waiting to reveal himself'.⁴ In other words, God was powerfully present by his Spirit in that darkness (Psalm 18:11), watching over what

had already been brought into being by his creative action and poised to continue the good work.

The situation in verse 2 prepares us for the revelatory words of command that follow. What God commences he finishes. There is a principle here that holds good in connection with the new creation as it applies to the church and individual believers. Paul reminds us in Philippians 1:6 'that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ'. God does not leave jobs half done.

The days of creation

The way in which God transformed the earth from an inhospitable, unformed mass into the beautiful, well-ordered world teeming with various forms of life and fit for human habitation is now described. God took time to do it. He could have produced the final product the moment he first created the universe from nothing. This was not God's way of doing things then, nor is it God's general way of working in our created world.

In the matter of salvation, the right moment in God's plan for sending his Son to redeem us was thousands of years after the initial promise in the Garden of Eden and nearly two thousand years after God's promise to Abraham. Even preparing believers for glory takes time. Though we are created anew in Christ Jesus in a moment and are positionally complete in him, in practice our conformity to what we are in Christ takes time. Only when Christ appears at the end of the age will we be completely transformed into his likeness, physically as well as spiritually. The final act, however, will be as quick as the initial act for we read, 'We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed' (1 Corinthians 15:51–52). We often like

things done in a hurry and we live in an age where the word 'instant' is the order of the day. God does things in his own time and way, and we are called to wait on him patiently with an obedient, submissive spirit.

The time it took to make the earth a habitable place and to produce the various life forms, including humans, is given as six days. The question that often arises at this point is whether these days are literal or a literary figure of speech. There is no warrant in this first chapter, or in the rest of Scripture, to indicate that the days are merely an artistic device. There is art and literary style, but this does not mean that the text must be read in a non-literal, non-chronological way. In Exodus 20:11 God through Moses reminds us that 'In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them.'⁵

Each of these days is spoken of as having an evening and morning. This should not lead us to think that the first day started with the evening and that the morning was the second half of the day. Evening is mentioned first because the first period of light had come to an end. When morning came it meant that the first day had been brought to an end and the second day had begun. This again would suggest that the days are at least similar to our twenty-four-hour days.

Immediately the cry goes up: 'You can't be serious! Science has proved that the earth with its life forms took millions of years to develop.' This kind of reaction is like saying, 'We know that dead men don't come back to life again; therefore the resurrection of Jesus can't be literally true; it must be symbolic.' But Jesus did literally rise from the dead, contrary to the normal rules of science. It is equally possible, then, for God to have brought our world to its present ordered position in six literal days of twenty-four hours. God is capable of doing such things.

Before we dismiss Christians who take a different view of these 'days', we do need to bear in mind a number of other pointers in the text. It is possible for all of us to jump to wrong conclusions. If scientists can misinterpret the evidence in nature, we must reckon with the fact that Christians are fallible and can misinterpret Scripture. We can be in danger of imposing our present knowledge of things on to the text of Scripture. Can we be sure that in this first week the earth was revolving on its axis at the same speed that it does today, or that it was revolving around the sun in the way it does today?

As we go through this chapter we find that although light was created on day one, the setting of the sun, moon and stars in relation to the earth did not take place until day four. Today we cannot conceive of a morning or evening without the sun. As we look at the text it suggests that for the first three days the sun and moon were not the deciding factors in measuring time. Again, though the impression we gain from this section is of an instantaneous creation, the next chapter implies a process with time gaps. On day six, for instance, after the land animals were made, we are told that humans, male and female, were created. However, in chapter 2, it is only after the man had named the animals that the woman was formed and we see that it involved a process. It is also interesting that in connection with the seventh day there is no mention of evening and morning. There is something never-ending about God's rest day.

Having said this, we are certainly given the impression that the days of Genesis 1 are like our twenty-four-hour days. In so far as those six days do have some unique features about them, some biblical scholars who want to be true to Scripture think of them as special divine days, the actual length of which is known only to God. Nevertheless, God created over a period of six

successive days similar to our own with an added day of rest, and in this way set a pattern for our seven-day week.⁶

Divine power and goodness

‘And God said’ occurs ten times in this chapter (1:3,6,9,11,14, 20,24,26,28,29) and is used to emphasize his commanding word, which is introduced by the word ‘Let ...’ This same God spoke the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-19). In these last days God has spoken through his Son, who is the Word of God seen in the flesh (Hebrews 1:1-3; John 1:14). We are reminded of God’s creative word in Psalm 33:6-9: ‘By the word of the LORD the heavens were made ...’ God’s authoritative word expresses his will. The sovereign will of God always comes to fulfilment and this is emphasized by the repeated formula, ‘and it was so’ (1:7,9,11,15,24,30). We all ought to ‘stand in awe of him’ as the psalmist reminds us (Psalm 33:8). From the outset it is made clear that God’s will was being done on earth. Because of the great rebellion against God’s rule described in chapter 3, human beings have been opposed to God’s will. The rest of the Bible shows how God has acted to bring that rebellion to an end. Christians are taught to pray for the coming of God’s kingdom and for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Another recurring phrase is the statement concerning God’s approval: ‘God saw that it was good’ (1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31). We often step back to view what we have made or to examine whether it comes up to our expectations. After each creative action, apart from that on day two, God was able to declare that it came up to his standard. God is good and all the works of God can only be good and beautiful. The ‘Preacher’ draws our attention to this point when he says that God ‘has made everything beautiful in its time’ (Ecclesiastes 3:11). The reason why no such approval was mentioned on day two is because the great expanse was not yet as God intended it. More needed to

be done. Only when the heavenly bodies had been set in their appointed places in the sky could it be pronounced good. At the end of the whole process God was absolutely satisfied with everything that he had made, and it was not just good, but 'very good' (1:31). The stuff of physical life is not evil. Any dualistic idea that some parts of the original creation were evil is completely ruled out by these words. There was no evil, nothing unpleasant, distasteful, or out of harmony, in what God had made. This makes any evolutionary theory about the way in which our world and its life forms came into being a complete non-starter.

Light

The God whose thunderous voice Israel heard on Mount Sinai out of the thick darkness (Deuteronomy 5:22–23) is the one who called for light to shine in the darkness (1:3). God first created the darkness, but now he created the light. 'I form the light and create darkness' (Isaiah 45:7). The Latin translation of 'Let there be light', *fiat lux*, has given rise to the phrase 'creation by *fiat*'. It was creation by God's commanding word and it was immediately effective. This created light was from a God who is described as 'light' in whom there is 'no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5), and who dwells 'in unapproachable light' (1 Timothy 6:16). God was able to dispel the darkness without reference to the sun, moon and stars. Scientists tell us that light existed long before our sun did. When the Egyptians were struck by the plague of thick darkness, a darkness which could be felt, Israel had light (Exodus 10:21–23). In John's vision of the holy city there was no need of sun or moon, 'for the glory of God illuminated it', and 'The Lamb is its light' (Revelation 21:23; 22:5).

What is true in the physical realm also applies in the spiritual. Those once dead in trespasses and sins but now made alive in Christ are described in these terms: 'You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord' (Ephesians 5:8). Paul explains

this as a new creation (Galatians 6:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17). He uses the language of Genesis to describe the change: ‘For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ (2 Corinthians 4:6). Do you know God’s creative light in your own life?

The work of separation and naming

In order to make our world habitable (see Isaiah 45:18) a series of separations took place. On the first day, ‘God divided the light from the darkness’ (1:4). By placing God’s evaluation (‘God saw the light, that it was good’) before the dividing, and not after it, as is the case from day three onwards, the passage teaches us, not only God’s preference for light, but that there is more to come in connection with dividing the light from the darkness. How God divided the two at the beginning is not revealed, but this was not to be the final means. Only after the creation and setting in place of the light-giving heavenly bodies did God pronounce it good (cf. 1:14–18).

On the second day, ‘God made the firmament, and divided the waters ...’ (1:7). At first it would appear that there was no atmosphere in which to live and breathe properly. There was not only water on the surface of the earth but water, perhaps heavy mist or dense fog, swirling above the surface of the earth. The firmament, or expanse, provided the space between the earth’s watery surface and the waters above it—i.e., the clouds. Again, there is no evaluation because more dividing was necessary before dry land emerged (1:10).

Though the word ‘divide’ is not used, a further separation took place on day three: ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear’ (1:9). A shoreless ocean was transformed so that there was dry land and seas. God set the boundaries (Jeremiah 5:22).

At the time of the flood God allowed those boundaries to be overstepped so that there was a partial return to the unformed and inhospitable place of Genesis 1:2.

It was God who called the darkness 'Night' and light 'Day', the firmament 'Heaven', or 'sky', the dry land 'Earth' and the gathered waters 'Seas'. By naming them God showed his authority and control over them (2 Kings 23:34). Pagans think in terms of a sky god, a sea god and an earth god. Genesis shows that they are all creations of the one true God and are subject to him. With these fundamental separations in place God could then pronounce that 'it was good' (1:10). From a transitional state without form, where everything was mixed, there was now form and there were clear demarcations.

Not all division or separation is wrong, but God is not a God of confusion. That is why things must be done decently and in order in church life (1 Corinthians 14:33,40). This same verb for 'divide' or 'separate' is used for the separation of the holy from the common and the clean from the unclean (Leviticus 10:10). The reason for all the separation laws in the old covenant legislation was to remind Israel, and to show to the world, in every aspect of their lives, that Israel was called by God to be his holy people, separate from all the other nations (Leviticus 20:25-26). Under the new covenant, while the old rules separating Jew from Gentile no longer apply in Christ, the principle behind those laws is the same. God's holy people have been separated from the world to be the Lord's. 'Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ... Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord"' (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). There is a moral order expressed in the Old Testament and underlined in the New by Jesus' life and teaching which points to the character

of God as the absolute standard and which should characterize the people of God in all ages: 'You shall be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect' (Matthew 5:48). God is the judge of what is good. He establishes what is right and everything must conform to his standard.

Plant life and the heavenly bodies

More creative activity takes place on day three: 'Let the earth bring forth grass' (1:11). In this context 'grass' is most probably being used as an all-inclusive term for vegetation. Two basic categories of plant life are then given: the seed-bearing herbs and the fruit-bearing trees. Having had a supernatural creation, the plants go on to propagate naturally: the herb 'yields seed' and the tree produces fruit 'whose seed is in itself'. Fertility and vegetation are the result, not of depraved pagan rituals, but of God's sovereign decree. The phrase 'according to its kind' (1:12) is broad enough to include 'species' as well as 'class' or 'group'. It is used not only of plant life, but of the creatures in the sea and air and on the land (1:21,24).

This introduces us to another type of separation and order in creation. Gordon Wenham comments: 'The different species of plant and animal life again bear testimony to God's creative plan. The implication, though not stated, is clear: what God has distinguished and created distinct, man ought not to confuse ... Things are the way they are because God made it so, and men and women should accept his decree' (Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:9-11).⁷ In the light of this, public opinion is right to be concerned about genetically modified plants and animals.

The separation laws of the old covenant were built on this creation law and acted as reminders to the Israelites of their own distinctiveness and the importance of not mixing with pagans in their religious practices. Christians are reminded of Paul's

words: 'You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons'; 'What part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?' (1 Corinthians 10:21; 2 Corinthians 6:15-16).

The anti-pagan message of the chapter is again strong in the account of God's creative activity on the fourth and fifth days. In the ancient world the heavenly bodies held a very important place in people's lives. The sun and moon were among their chief gods, and stars were thought to control human affairs. Such beliefs are not uncommon today and the reading of horoscopes has increased in popularity. To counter this, the biblical record gives much space to spelling out the place that these God-given lights have in our world. 'God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night.' In the rest of Moses' writings the word for 'light' or 'light-bearer' is used to denote the lamp in the tabernacle (Exodus 35:14,28). 'He made the stars also' (1:16). The stars are mentioned at the end almost as an afterthought. Things which come to be feared by humans are all creations of God. They are not eternal, they do not have any independent existence and they are not to be worshipped (Deuteronomy 4:19). The account does not even mention the sun (*shemesh*) and moon (*yariah*) by name lest people associate them with Shamash the sun god and Yarih the moon god. It is their function that is emphasized: 'to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night', not as powers but as light-bearers, 'and to divide the light from the darkness' (1:17-18), thus completing what God had started on the first day. From this day onward daylight was to be determined by the sun. The luminaries were also given 'for signs and seasons, and for days and years' (1:14). In other words, they would enable people to measure and keep time and to determine the festive seasons mentioned in the law.

‘God set them in the firmament of the heavens’ (1:17). Kidner remarks that ‘The description is unashamedly geocentric.’⁸ From the perspective of a human observer on the earth they appear to be in the sky’s atmosphere. In the same way the Bible speaks, as do all of us today (including scientists!), of the sun rising and setting.

Living creatures

Days four to six present the second phase of God’s creative work. The first three days brought about form and order to an earth ‘without form’ through a series of ‘separations’. In the days that follow the earth is no longer ‘void’ but filled with an abundance of living creatures. The second set of three days corresponds to the first set. Thus we find the creation of lights on the fourth day matches the creation of light on the first day. On the fifth day God created the creatures that occupy the waters of the seas and that fly in the sky, and this corresponds to some extent to the creation of the waters and the formation of the expanse on the second day. The creation of land animals and humans on the sixth day accords with that of the dry land and its productivity on the third day.

Notice the emphasis on the profusion of life: ‘Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures’ (1:20). This is the first reference to conscious life. The expression ‘living creatures’ (also 1:24) is translated ‘life’ (1:30) and ‘living being’ (2:7). Such life did not appear by accident, but was the direct result of God’s command. Special attention is drawn to the creation of the ‘great sea creatures’ (1:21). For the first time since the opening sentence the word ‘create’ is used. In Near-Eastern mythology such powerful creatures were worshipped and associated with all that was evil and rebellious. Later biblical writers used these pagan allusions, such as Leviathan the sea serpent and Rahab the sea dragon, to symbolize God’s enemies and to show God’s

power and control over all that seemed threatening and fearful (Psalm 74:13–14; Isaiah 27:1; 51:9). Here the point is made that these so-called monsters are not rival deities needing to be defeated, but awe-inspiring creatures subject to God (see Job 41; Psalm 104:26). When they were created they too could be pronounced good (1:21–22).

God not only inspected what he had created, but for the first time he pronounced a blessing: ‘And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill ...”’ (1:22). The same words occur again in verses 27 and 28 after the creation of human beings. It seems clear that God’s blessing is associated with the ability to be fertile and procreate. Infertility, on the other hand, is often associated with divine judgement. The blessing of God is one of the great themes of Genesis. God not only blessed animals, humans and the Sabbath, but went on to bless Adam, Noah and the patriarchs in particular. The divine blessing involved filling the earth with animals and human beings. On the other hand, the curse of God brought about depopulation and the extinction of life, as we see most solemnly at the time of the Flood and in the destruction of Sodom.

The unusual expression, ‘Let the earth bring forth the living creature’ (1:24), reminds us of what was said earlier concerning the earth producing vegetation (1:12). It highlights the parallel between days three and six. As the dry land ‘brought forth’ vegetation on the third day, so every animal that inhabited the dry land was brought into being on the sixth day. The use of the expression ‘bring forth’ does not mean that the animals sprouted like plants, but that God made them from the ground (see 2:19).

‘The living creature’ (see 1:21) is classified into three main categories: ‘cattle’, which includes domesticated animals; ‘creeping thing’ refers to reptiles and other creatures and insects that have such short legs that they crawl, or appear to slide along