

Creation in Old Testament Theology

Paul R. House

Paul R. House is Professor of Old Testament and Chair of the Dept. of Bible and Theology at Wheaton College. Previously he taught at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Taylor University. In addition to various books and scholarly articles, he is the author of *Old Testament Theology* (IVP).

Introduction and Methodology

In recent times few passages in scripture have generated as much heated discussion as Genesis 1-2. Naturalistic evolutionists have debated adherents of a literal six-day creation. Theistic evolutionists, framework theory proponents, and others have attempted to find mediating ground in the disputes. Many people simply do not want to engage in the debate, or do not possess the scientific or theological background to comment on the discussions. Through the years much has been accomplished to clarify what the Bible and what science teaches. Gains have been made, though not without significant struggle. Happily, many of the gains made have been in the area of the theology of creation.¹

This article does not attempt to cover the various areas involved in these debates. Rather, it attempts to strengthen readers' theological understanding of creation by tracing the use of creation theology in selected portions of the Old Testament canon. It tries to broaden readers' appreciation for creation theology by demonstrating some of the ways writers of scripture used the truths found in Genesis 1-2 to challenge or comfort their readers. Perhaps this method will then help teachers, students, and ministers to use these texts in their own context.

Because of the current diversity of approaches to Old Testament Theology in academic and ecclesiastical circles, it is appropriate to explain the methodology that will be used to accomplish these goals. Given the brevity of this article and the fact that my general method for pur-

suage Old Testament and Biblical Theology is outlined elsewhere,² I will present my procedure in skeletal form here. Simply stated, Old Testament Theology as it is practiced in this article follows five basic principles.

First, this article proceeds with a commitment to the Bible as God's written word (see Ps 19:7-14 and 2 Tim 3:16-17).³ Since the Bible is God's written word, it carries the authority and character of God. What this means is that the faithfulness, kindness, severity, truthfulness, coherence, accuracy, and authority connected with God's person is likewise attached to the scriptures. It also means that the Bible's main (though not sole) concern is to reveal the character of the triune God. As the Bible unfolds, a distinct portrait of the Lord emerges. God remains greater than the portrait. One never learns all there is to know about God, but one does learn about God.⁴

Second, since the Bible shares God's unified, coherent, and complete character, this article attempts to interpret the Bible's teachings on creation as a unity.⁵ This principle is thereby drawn from the nature of scripture, not from an external system imposed on the text. As Carl Henry writes, "The very fact of disclosure by the one living God assures the comprehensive unity of divine revelation."⁶ By this statement Henry means that the Bible's unified moral message and consistent emphasis on redemption in history is an outgrowth of God's inherently unified nature. Henry adds, "The revelation of the living God is therefore one comprehensively unified revelation. Its basic

unity derives from the purposive initiative of the self-revealing God, and not from a harmony imposed by philosophical manipulation or theological projection. The strands of that divine revelation imply no discontinuity or rupture in the unity of divine disclosure.”⁷

Third, this article interprets the Bible’s unified teaching on creation in canonical order. It does so because the Bible treats itself as a connected, canonical, theological whole.⁸ After all, in the Old Testament the Former Prophets reflect on the Law of Moses (see Josh 1:1-9; 1 Kings 2:1-10; etc). The Latter Prophets note the importance of Abraham, Samuel, and Moses (Jer 15:2), and they also cite one another (see Jeremiah 2-6; Zech 1:1-6; etc). The Psalmists read the history of Israel as a great unfolding act of the God who rules the universe (see Psalms 78; 89; 104-106; etc), and mention the Law and the testimonies as part of God’s written word (see Ps 19: 7-14). Daniel accepts Jeremiah as an accurate predictive prophet (Dan 9:1-19). Ezra considers himself a priest committed to Moses’ Law (Ezra 7:10). In the New Testament Jesus reads the Old Testament as a connected whole stretching from the Law, to the Prophets, to the Psalms (Luke 24:44). In theological debate the apostle Paul often argues from the Law and the Prophets to the Writings—in other words in canonical order (see Romans 4; Galatians 4; etc). Peter mentions Paul’s writings (2 Pet 3:14-18), and both apostles clearly knew at least some of the contents of the Gospels. Hebrews, James, and Revelation demonstrate a vast and sustained interest in the connection between the Old and New Testaments. They write carefully about how this connection affects salvation, holy living, and several related issues. Thus, it is appropriate to analyze

Old Testament Theology as it unfolds in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, and Biblical Theology as it continues through the Gospels and Acts, Pauline Epistles, and General Epistles and Revelation.

Fourth, this article attempts to wed exegesis and theology. Walter Kaiser was correct a generation ago to stress exegetical theology, and he remains correct today.⁹ Old Testament Theology ought to arise from a careful analysis of the text. It ought to utilize the best results of historical criticism, though it must not become captive to reconstructed histories of how theology emerged in Israel and the early church. History must support theology, not the other way around. Exegesis should keep scholars from imposing theological systems on texts that cannot bear that particular weight. Of course, in an article of this length it is not possible to offer all the elements of exegesis that went into the theological comments. Still, I hope that it will be apparent that exegetical work has been done, even if readers disagree with the article’s exegetical and theological conclusions.

Fifth, this article offers summary statements on the themes that emerge from exegetical, unitary, canonical, and theological analysis. Hopefully, these summaries will not obscure the diversity of the Bible as they seek to stress the unity of scripture. If used correctly, this method should enable readers to see the sweeping scope of the Bible’s theological witness without losing a keen sense of the many particular ways that God’s word coheres. This unity within diversity is especially essential for grasping the many facets of creation, for this theme traverses the whole of scripture.

Creation and God's Person: Creation in the Law

Obviously, the Law begins the Bible's sustained interest in creation and its attendant theology. It is here that themes such as God's personal involvement with human beings, God's sovereignty, God's power, God's giving of standards, and God's willingness to forgive erring human sinners have their origins. It is also here that the fact that God is the only creator, indeed the only deity, begins its key role in Biblical Theology. In some way all subsequent doctrines flow from these truths, all of which are founded on the principle that the Lord is the creator. These truths must be received and processed through human reason, but in the end they must be accepted as true by faith.

The church has long confessed creation as a key article of faith. After all, based on Genesis 1-2, the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed indicate that at the head of all Biblical Theology stands the principle that the living God of the Bible is the maker of heaven and earth, of all things whether seen or unseen. From its inception the church has claimed that the Law stresses that the Lord, the Lord alone, made the heavens and the earth, and the whole of the Bible unfolds the implications of this emphasis. Since the truth of this affirmation is not self-evident, however, it is necessary that human beings accept by faith God's revealed word about creation. Carl Henry asserts, "The question of the ultimate source of the universe brings human experience and reasoning to a standstill that only revelation from without or above can overcome."¹⁰ He adds that creation requires an act of faith on the part of Bible readers.¹¹ Similarly, Karl Barth argues that "the doctrine of the

creation no less than the remaining content of Christian confession is an article of faith" that must be believed by those who trust in God's revelation.¹² Both Henry and Barth conclude that Hebrews 11:3 summarizes the key connection between faith and creation: "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible."¹³ Clearly, then, one's understanding of creation is fundamental to one's faith in God and to one's commitment to the Christian faith. How one responds in faith to this first biblical claim has ramifications for one's whole Biblical Theology.

Of course, Genesis 1-2 is the most crucial passage in the Law concerning creation. This text does not include everything the Law, let alone the Bible, has to say about creation, but it does provide the framework for all that follows. Though Genesis 1-2 offers important insights about the human race and the created order, its most significant instruction is in the area of God's person. As Ken Mathews observes, these chapters teach, "God is not merely an idea. He is Eternal Being whom we can know and experience personally."¹⁴ Once one grasps the importance of God's person, it is then possible to place human beings and the created order in their proper perspective.

Genesis 1:1 claims that the Lord is the sole source and cause of creation's existence. This verse also indicates that though the Lord is directly and personally involved in creation the Lord is separate from creation. Commentators generally agree with these initial points, but they have often debated what the opening phrase teaches about the timing of creation. William J. Dumbrell writes,

Since there is no agreed-upon translation of the two verses, interpreting them is fraught with difficulties. Verse 1 may be translated absolutely (“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”) or dependently (“When God began to create the heavens and the earth, ...”). Though both translations are syntactically and contextually possible, Genesis 1:1 is best regarded as an absolute beginning, and indication of God’s control over all creation as complete.¹⁵

Aalders agrees with Dumbrell’s conclusion. He comments, “First of all, this is the most natural and obvious interpretation. Furthermore, this is the rendition that is found in every ancient translation, without any exception. Finally, although the alternative interpretation is linguistically possible, it does not reflect common Hebrew usage.”¹⁶ After a very careful and detailed discussion of the matter, Claus Westermann agrees that the traditional translation is accurate.¹⁷

Dumbrell, Aalders, and Westermann all conclude that even if the temporal dispute is solved, the most important concept in the verse is that “the world owes its existence solely to God.”¹⁸ It is this personal relatedness to God that “provides the explanation of ourselves and our world.”¹⁹ Thus, at the very beginning of all things that are seen and unseen the Lord was there and the Lord was the initiator of creation. Indeed the very word that is translated “created” here is a verb that always has the Lord as its subject. In other words, there is no other biblical character able to create.

Besides emphasizing that the world owes its existence to God, the only one able to create, Genesis 1:1 reveals that the Lord is solitary and unique. That is, there is no other god involved in the creation process and therefore there is no deity like

the Lord. Obviously, this notion of God as solitary deity makes the Genesis creation account different from virtually, if not actually, all other ancient creation stories. Though the Bible doctrine of monotheism grows as the scriptures unfold, the kernel of this truth is planted here. As early as Deuteronomy 32:39 the text proclaims, “See now that I am He, and there is no god besides me....” The twin notions that there is only one God and that this God is the creator has great implications for Old Testament Theology, as will be noted below.

Genesis 1:2 indicates that the Lord personally works in creation through his spirit. Though the earth was “formless and void,” the “Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.” Though it is possible for “spirit” to mean either “wind” or “spirit,” C.F. Keil correctly comments that here the spirit is “the creative Spirit of God, the principle of all life (Ps. xxxiii. 6, civ. 30), which worked upon the formless, lifeless mass....”²⁰ S. R. Driver agrees, adding, “The chaos of v. 2 was not left in hopeless gloom and death; already, even before God ‘spake’ (v. 3), the spirit of God, with its life-giving energy, was ‘brooding’ over the waters, like a bird upon its nest, and (so it seems to be implied) fitting them in some way to generate and maintain life, when the Divine *fiat* should be pronounced.”²¹ The separation between “God” and “the spirit of God” in this passage does not reveal two gods, but rather two persons of the same God acting purposefully in creation.

The first five days of creation are depicted in Genesis 1:3-25. In this section the personal God speaks things into existence, orders them, assesses them, and moves to the next day. At all times the Lord is portrayed as intelligent, powerful,

and orderly. Perhaps above all, God is absolutely sovereign in this passage. All that occurs God does. God is fully capable, fully responsible, and fully knowledgeable about everything in creation. He not only has no equal in the creating process, none is needed for the creation to be “good.”

So far in Genesis 1:1-25 God has been personally involved with creation as a whole. He has personally hovered over the waters, spoken the world into existence out of nothing, called the result of the creative activity “good,” and named each portion of the world order. Now the Lord adds to his personal involvement in his creation, for in 1:26-31 God makes man and woman in his image, blesses them, and commands them to care for the earth.

Though many interpretations of “God’s image” have been offered,²² at the very least the term means that human beings are able to relate to God in a way different from animals, plants, or planets. Only human beings can relate to God through spoken communication; only human beings receive God’s personal blessing; only human beings are stewards of the rest of the created order. Barth comments, “It is in consequence of their divine likeness that men are distinguished from all other creatures with autonomous life, by a superior position, by a higher dignity and might, by a greater power of disposal and control.”²³ Human beings have both more privileges and more responsibilities than all God’s other creatures. Marsha Wilfong correctly notes,

But if humankind is to carry out the task of dominion as God’s representatives on the earth, then the exercise of human dominion should imitate God’s own dominion over creation, and should have as its goal the fulfillment of God’s good pur-

pose for creation. Exploitation of animals or the earth is not appropriate. Autonomous dominion that ignores or seeks to overthrow God’s ultimate dominion over creation is not appropriate.²⁴

As persons in relationship with God, human beings are told to rule and have dominion in a manner similar to the authority exercised by the sovereign creator. Their relationship with God highlights the fact that they are thinking, responsible, communicative persons, and it is this relationship with God that allows them to act as God’s representative on earth.

Genesis 2:1-3 highlights God’s satisfaction with creation and God’s kindness. All that needs to be done has been done and is good. Thus, God has completed all creation tasks. Now God ceases to create anything new and enters into the satisfaction and rest that come from doing a task completely and perfectly.²⁵ Then, to set an example for human beings, God rests on the seventh day and sets that day apart as a day of rest for all time. Work must not become the only constant element in human life. Ceasing, rest, and satisfaction must punctuate life when life is fully “good.” God is kind enough to keep human beings from engaging in endless activity that has no room for completion. God is gracious enough to make rest a permanent part of the cycle of life even before sin causes work to be a burden as well as a joy.

Genesis 2:4-25 focuses on God’s initial relationship with the newly created human race. The self-existent, self-sufficient creator creates the first male (Adam) in 2:4-7. The man’s life comes directly from God, not from any process of nature. When Adam awakens to life it is in a garden prepared for his sustenance, and

it is in this garden that Adam begins to work and care for the ground—in other words to fulfill the command given in 1:26-31. Since it is not good that the man be alone (2:18), the Lord makes a woman from Adam's side. They are brought together in a permanent relationship devoid of shame or embarrassment, for they are "naked, but not ashamed" (2:25).

God's personal concern for the first human beings is not only shown in his desire for them to enjoy one another and to be sustained in their garden home. It is also shown in his concern for their ongoing relationship with their creator. God walks with them and allows them total freedom with one exception: they may "not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (2:17). Breaking this command will bring death. The man and woman may not do as they please and maintain a good relationship with their creator. To abide by this prohibition they must trust their creator's word. They must believe that he has told them the truth about their situation. Faith is required. In this sense they have entered into a faith-based agreement with their God. Keeping this command is no meritorious work, for they would not even know they were in danger unless the creator had told them of the stricture.

Of course, this ideal situation unravels in Genesis 3. The woman and man do not trust God's word. Instead, they believe the word of the serpent and act on what they believe. As Daniel Fuller writes, "But in thus disbelieving God's mercy, Eve and Adam utterly scorned his glory, whose apex is his disposition to be merciful and benevolent."²⁶ Though there are many consequences to this lack of faith, a primary one is that human beings no longer live in a perfect setting in a sinless state.

Rather, they dwell in a place marred by the thorns and pains of sin. Creation itself and the chief creature in it are both affected. Though in quite distinct ways, both the creation and the creature need to be redeemed. Both need to be remade if they are to be as they were at the outset of the Bible.

At the end of the Genesis creation accounts certain theological elements are in place. First, the Lord has been portrayed as unique, personal, sovereign, caring, and good. God's character is firmly presented as the core of all that is best in creation. Whatever is good about the heavens and earth can be traced directly back to God. Second, human beings are entrenched as the flawed stewards of creation. Third, sin must be overcome for creation to return to its intended purpose. Readers are left to cling doggedly to the belief that the personal God capable of creating the created order will also have the ability to recreate it as needed. In fact, the promises made alongside the punishments set out for the erring humans indicate that God will defeat evil through the offspring of a woman, an event that will in turn undo the damage done by sin (see Gen 3:15). Until then, however, the creation must groan for deliverance (see Rom 8:18-25), cared for by the very ones who caused it to fall from its previous heights.

Creation and God's People: Creation in the Prophets

The Bible's emphasis on creation hardly stops with the Law. Indeed, the Prophets handle creation themes in a manner calculated to deal with the specific problems in their eras as well as with the larger problems related to human sin left unresolved at the end of the Law.

Though other prophets could certainly be cited, Isaiah and Amos are good representatives of how the prophetic literature uses creation themes to correct and exhort the people of their day. Both Isaiah and Amos focus on how a proper grasp of creation theology can form, or re-form, God's people into a holy nation.

Isaiah 40-48 addresses an audience that has been devastated by the Assyrian invasion known as the Sennacherib Crisis, which occurred c. 711 or 701 B.C.²⁷ This audience could easily have been tempted to serve the gods of Assyria, as king Hezekiah's father Ahaz had done (see 2 Kings 16:10-18), given the fact that Assyria had destroyed all of Judah except Jerusalem, which Isaiah 1:1-9 says was left with but a few survivors. They could also have thought it wise to turn to the Babylonian gods, for the Babylonians were constantly opposing Assyria (see Isaiah 39). They might even have considered venerating Egypt's gods, for the Egyptians had been able to withstand Assyria's attempts to overrun their territory. Regardless, the people of God were dispirited, and felt as though the Lord had abandoned them (see Isa 40:1-27). Thus, they were looking to other religious options instead of the one God revealed in scripture.

Isaiah responds to this situation by applying creation theology to the people's attitudes and actions. First, he deals with their feelings of rejection by highlighting God's greatness, power, sovereignty, and mercy in 40:12-31. God cannot grow weary, and God cannot forget Israel, Isaiah argues. Why? Because the Lord is the creator, the one who stretched out the heavens and the earth (40:12). Because the Lord is the one who makes nations and decides how important or unimportant

they will become (40:15-17). Because it is the Lord who sets up and takes down rulers (40:23). Because it is the Lord who commands the stars in the sky, and who is quite able to marshal forces for Israel's sake (40:26). Clearly, Isaiah expects to hearten Israel by reminding them that the powerful, sustaining creator is on their side, comforting and helping them. He also wishes to bring them closer to the personal God with whom they entered into a covenant in the Law.

Second, in 43:1-44:8 Isaiah attempts to eliminate other gods from Israel's consideration. To do so, he states that the Lord, the creator, formed Israel (43:1) and has been with Israel in the past (43:2). Therefore, Israel must not be afraid now (43:5-6), for the Lord will restore all those he has created for his glory (43:7). If God has created Israel for his glory, then it stands to reason that God will gain glory for himself by sustaining the chosen people during this horrible time.²⁸ God's creating was purposeful in Genesis 1-2, and it is purposeful here.

Further, Isaiah bluntly states that the Lord is God and there is no other god (43:10). Paul Hanson asserts, "With these magisterial words monotheism enters the disarray of a world long mired in the confusion of contentious gods (cf. Psalm 82)."²⁹ Clearly, if there is no other god, then there is no other savior (43:11). If there is no other god, then there is no other god for either Israel or the nations. This one God orders human events. There is no one to stop him (43:13). Israel should draw close to God because of the past, as 43:1-7 stresses, but also because there is no other deity with ontological substance. Isaiah counsels Israel to forget about other gods because they are not real. A stronger monotheistic statement could hardly

be made.

Finally, in 43:14-44:8 Isaiah proclaims that the Lord will prove his uniqueness by declaring the future. Of course, God has predicted the future before, such as in the exodus accounts, yet Isaiah makes the point again. This time Israel is to note that the only God, the creator, knows what will happen to them in the future so that they will reject all other so-called deities. God promises to heal Israel, bring exiles home, and restore the nation. Without question, the Lord is making predictions about future contingent events. Much could happen to alter a mere guess or studied sense of probability, but the sovereign creator knows and declares the future. The best proof of this sovereign knowledge of contingent future events is the promise to send Cyrus, who has not yet been born, to release Israel from bondage. This event, which occurs c. 538 B.C., is similar in substance to God's pledge in 1 Kings 13 to send Josiah to reform Israelite worship. Of course, this prediction is made decades before Josiah is born. God knows all future events, and is willing to reveal some of those events to encourage Israel to turn to the creator rather than to the creature for help.

Third, Isaiah informs Israel that the Lord rules the future for his own glory in 44:9-48:16. Israel must now choose God over idols.³⁰ Though Israel has been a rebel from birth (48:8), God will use their current hard times to refine them for his glory (48:10-11). The one who founded the earth will make this promise come to pass (48:12-13). God will save Israel from Babylon in the future (48:14), and God will make Israel a witness to the nations.³¹ In this way the Lord will be acknowledged as the ruler of all creation.

Fourth, Isaiah looks well beyond the

current created order to an ideal future in 65:17-25. At the end of time the creator will "create new heavens and a new earth" (65:17). Weeping and illness will cease (65:19-20). Frustration with work, one of the consequences of sin according to Genesis 3:17-19, will no longer be a factor in human existence. Peace among all creatures will be restored (65:24-25). Coupled with the fact that Isaiah 25:6-12 has already promised that death, the veil that lies over all people, will be removed at the end of time, this promise of new heaven and new earth by the creator amounts to an eternal promise with no negative components. Creation itself will be remade. Death will be eradicated. The question is whether or not Israel will believe the creator or whether they will turn to other deities.

Clearly, Isaiah does not simply restate the doctrine of creation, as important as that restatement might be. Rather, he applies creation truths to a setting quite different from the one in which Moses first articulated the elements of Genesis 1-2. In effect what Isaiah does is preach the truths of scripture to a hurting, doubting, wavering people. By doing so he ministers to the faithful of that age, to be sure, yet he also ministers to every successive era that needs a similar message. By doing so he also offers a model of preaching God's word to preachers of every era, including our own.

Amos is not as interested in comforting and instructing as he is in waking up a stubborn, sinful nation. Working c. 760-750 B.C.,³² Amos seeks to warn the northern kingdom of Israel to repent before judgment comes. To achieve his purposes he calls upon creation theology at three crucial junctures to punctuate his emphasis on the day of the Lord, or the day of

God's wrath. This day is coming not only for Israel, but for all surrounding nations as well (see 1:2-2:8).

After declaring Israel and its neighbors guilty of a variety of heinous acts in 1:1-2:8, the prophet proceeds to focus on Israel's unjust and unrighteousness ways in 2:9-4:5. God brought Israel out of Egypt and called some of Israel's best to be Nazirites and prophets, only to have these messengers rejected (2:9-12). Thus, judgment must come (2:13-15). God's word for the people now is one of punishment, not of deliverance (3:1-15). Their richest men and women have oppressed others and sinned in their religious observances (4:1-5), so God sent them smaller punishments to warn them (4:6-11), all to no avail.

Why should Israel be terrified? Why should Israel repent? Because the creator has decided to judge (4:12-13). The very one who devised creation, who made mountains, who knows human thoughts, and who rules night and day is now devising judgment for them. Israel must seek God (5:1-7), or the creator, the one who controls darkness and light and the raging seas, will pour out wrath on them (5:8-9). Those currently at ease in Zion will go into horrible exile (6:1-7). Judgment will come (7:1-8:3), for the one who made the heavens and earth will bring it to pass (9:5-6).

These texts use the fact that the Lord is the creator to warn (4:12-13), express God's wrath over injustice (5:8-9), and announce the end of God's patience with a rebellious people (9:5-6). In other words, Amos uses creation theology quite differently than Isaiah does. Amos wants his audience to sense fear at continuing to rebel against the creator.³³ He wants his audience to take no comfort in the knowledge that there is no other god. He wants

his audience to tremble at the thought of the creator and let this awe change their behavior. Though quite different from Isaiah's use of creation, Amos's messages use creation theology effectively and accurately. He, too, offers an example of how creation may be preached and taught in subsequent generations, especially to rebellious ones.

Isaiah and Amos use creation theology to remake God's people into a holy nation and a kingdom of priests, a goal first set forth in Exodus 19:5-6. Isaiah attempts to restore the people's confidence in the Lord by stressing God's uniqueness and sovereign power. He comforts them by calling them to respond to a message steeped in the theology of Genesis 1-2. Amos is no less committed to creation theology, but his message is more urgent and searching. He asserts that the same creator who made the heavens and earth in seven days has ordained a day of judgment. Israel has sinned against the creator of the world and of their national identity. Therefore, Amos also uses sound theology to make his call to repentance. To both prophets, creation theology concerning the personal God is the key to a cleansed and chastened people of God.

Creation and the Worship and Wisdom of God: Creation in the Writings

Throughout history the people of God have turned to the psalms for use in personal and corporate worship.³⁴ Here the faithful have found sources of instruction, inspiration, consolation, chastisement, and hope. In these texts the faithful have discovered divine revelation that expresses praise, petition, and lament. The doctrine of creation is one of the

themes that conveyed these elements of worship. Though other emphases could be noted, the psalms use creation theology to stress God's majesty and God's uniqueness as a means of highlighting the fact that the Lord merits worship.

Though their relevant passages are not as well known or as often used as the psalms, Proverbs and Job also make significant use of creation theology. In these books, which are commonly considered part of Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, creation theology is strategic for declaring God's personal wisdom and absolute sovereignty over the created order. These twin emphases are in turn vital for these books' arguments that the Lord is the source of all wisdom and that the Lord capably rules the universe in a way that demonstrates he is worth serving under all conditions.

Several psalms offer compelling evidence that the Lord is majestic and worthy of worship. For instance, Psalm 8, a hymn of praise, begins with a focus on God's greatness. Here the Lord is declared to be majestic and to have displayed his splendor above the heavens (8:1). The psalmist thinks so because God has created the heavens, yet has entrusted human beings with the stewardship of the earth first introduced in Genesis 1:26-31 (8:3-8). This knowledge leads the psalmist to praise (8:9). Creation themes are used here to demonstrate God's greatness, God's authority over human beings, and human responsibility in the created order. Without question, this text claims that a worshiper in tune with creation theology inextricably links worship and action.

In Psalm 90 God's personal majesty receives further definition through detailed creation theology. In 90:1 the

Lord is depicted as protecting Israel throughout all generations. Then the psalmist claims that God has no personal end or beginning, and bases his opinion on God's role as creator. The author says to God, "Before the mountains were born/ Or you gave birth to the earth and the world/ Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (90:2). Clearly, this text recognizes no end or beginning for the one who has created the world. It also recognizes that God's "majesty can hardly be grasped by his creatures."³⁵ There has never been a time when the Lord was not God, and no such time will ever arise. Because the Lord is the creator, the psalmist goes on to argue that God has power to give and take life (90:3-6). The author also determines that one must pray to the creator for deliverance and forgiveness (90:7-17). Thus, in this psalm the creator is also the giver and taker of life, the one who forgives sin, the one who shelters Israel, and the one who has no beginning or end. Given these facts, it is appropriate for the psalmist to take all needs to the Lord. Creation theology becomes the basis, then, for intercession, for healing, and for confession of sin.

Psalms 89 and 104-106 begin their survey of God's saving works on Israel's behalf with creation. Here creation is the beginning point of God's redemptive plan that culminates in the Davidic covenant and the need for deliverance from exile. In these psalms the people cry out for help as they recall all that God has done in the creation of the heavens and earth, the exodus, the conquest, and finally in the chastisement of the chosen people. Current forgiveness would become, then, the latest in a long line of great acts that began with Genesis 1-2. Creation theology in this passage is intended to lead to contrition,

and ultimately to cleansing and wholeness.

Psalms 93, 95, and 96 return to God's uniqueness, the theme that permeated Isaiah 40-48. The same God who firmly established the world reigns now, according to Psalm 93:1-2, and this reigning Lord merits praise (93:3-5). Further, Psalm 95:1-7 states that Israel ought to worship the one who made them. This God who made them is their king, a king "above all gods" (95:3), and a God who constantly exercises his rights as sovereign.³⁶ The reason the Lord must be "feared above all gods" (96:4) is that "all the gods of the people are idols" (96:5). Like Isaiah 40-48, these texts encourage Israel to reject all other so-called deities in favor of the creator, deliverer, and healer. Creation theology renders all other gods inappropriate rivals to the living God, the unique creator. The creator reigns over creation, is worthy of praise and obedience, and towers above all rivals to his reasonable expectation of worship.

Job and Proverbs have as high a view of God's person and worth as the psalms, but they use these beliefs to make different theological points. For Job the issue is whether or not the creator is faithful, trustworthy, and kind. God's power is never questioned in the book. Rather, God's use of his unlimited authority and strength is under scrutiny. Thus, it is vital that in Job chapters 38-42 emphasize the capable and kindly manner in which God, the creator, rules creation.

Job 38-41 utilizes several key creation-oriented metaphors to stress God's benevolent control of the universe and God's role as the only God and sole creator. Here God reveals himself to Job as master builder, the midwife that gives birth to the sea, light's commanding officer, and the keeper of the world's most

intimate secrets (38:4-24).³⁷ God claims to be the one who has laid the foundation for everything on earth (38:4-7), both in the inanimate and animate orders of existence (38:39-39:30). He identifies himself as the creator who also sustains all that has been made (see 38:25-41). At the end of this section Job confesses his ignorance in matters related to ruling the universe and pledges silence before the creator (40:3-5). Job 40:6-41:34 concludes the section by re-emphasizing the creator's power. In this passage God the creator states that he alone is able to tame the great sea creatures that terrify sailors.

Thus, God responds to Job's cries for information with a description of the creator and sustainer's work. This answer satisfies Job (42:1-6). It is enough for him that the creator has responded in person, responded to serious questions with serious answers, and responded with creation theology. God comforts Job with a comfort as old as creation and as powerful as the creator himself.

In Job, then, the creator is worth serving not because the creator never allows the faithful to suffer, but because the creator can be trusted to rule carefully and ably even when the faithful suffer. God is also worth serving because he responds to the hurting personally and through the kindness of the sort of true friends that visit Job in 42:7-17.

God's personal possession and use of wisdom as creator is not missing in the psalms and Job, but Proverbs 8:22-31 makes this point quite overtly. Indeed, "at the very beginning," at the start of creation, the creator "acquired," "gained," or "created" wisdom. Though all three readings are possible, the first two are preferable given the general Old Testament usage of the word.³⁸ Having gained

or acquired wisdom, the Lord then had wisdom beside him rejoicing at what was made (8:24-31). Thus, wisdom was indispensable, fundamental, and delightful when God created.³⁹ God chose and used wisdom to make certain that the created order reflected intelligent, joyous design.

Certain themes emerge from this text. First, God's attribute of wisdom was with him from the start. Therefore, wisdom is eternal, the first thing God needed to make the world.⁴⁰ Since God used this wisdom, the world has unity and coherence. The creation itself exhibits the wisdom of its maker. Second, the Lord rejoices in wisdom. He enjoys it. In fact, this passage may include the notion that God's joy in wisdom is akin to having wisdom move playfully through creation (8:30-31).⁴¹ Third, every segment of the Old Testament canon testifies to God's creator status. Fourth, the personification of wisdom in 8:30-31 does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the wisdom mentioned here amounts to an Old Testament depiction of Christ. This connection is tempting given the wisdom imagery in Colossians 1:15-17; 2:3 and Revelation 3:14, but one must be cautious here. After all, 8:22 sounds as if wisdom is purchased, possessed, or created by God, which hardly matches the images of divine Father-Son unity found in the Gospel of John and elsewhere.

The Writings' teachings on creation leave readers with a sense of confidence in the creator. God is the only God. As creator, the Lord is the divine king, the one who blesses and judges. The Lord does not shield the faithful from all suffering, yet it is plausible to believe that this suffering occurs within the framework of a universe under control. The creator has not lost the ability to govern what

has been made. Indeed, the creator set forth the earth's foundations in wisdom, and this wisdom permeates the whole of creation. Those who need wisdom may therefore come to the creator for that wisdom. They will find a powerful, unique, wise, and compassionate God who is worth serving under all conditions.

Conclusion

The Old Testament's usage of the truth that God is the creator is obviously multifaceted. Genesis 1-2 teaches that God alone is the creator, the cause and source of all things that are made. It claims that the creator is personal, and as such entrusts human beings with the care of the earth and with divine laws. It sets forth principles about God's intelligence, goodness, and kindness.

Isaiah and Amos accept and build upon the points made in Genesis 1-2. Writing to a dispirited, wavering, people of uncertain faith, Isaiah uses creation theology to comfort, challenge, correct, embolden, and instruct. Isaiah even goes so far as to claim that in the future the creator will create a new heavens and earth in which sickness, sorrow, death, and enemies are no longer factors. When this day occurs the world will indeed have moved from creation to new creation. On the other hand, Amos has little comfort to offer his erring, stubborn, oppressing audience. He uses creation theology to punctuate warnings about judgment for oppression and announcements that the creator's patience with sinful Israel has been exhausted. In the hands of the prophets, then, creation is a two-edged sword that can either comfort or condemn, depending on the circumstances at hand.

Psalms, Job, and Proverbs adapt pro-

phetic uses of Genesis 1-2 still further. The psalmists use Genesis 1:26-31 as a reason for praise, and monotheistic passages such as Isaiah 40-48 as reasons to bow down and worship the only living God. Job stresses the notion that God is a wise, capable, and revelatory God to conclude that the Lord is worth trusting and serving when one suffers due to no fault of their own. Proverbs invites those who need wisdom to seek it from the one who has possessed it from the very beginning. Wisdom is available to human beings because the creator wills to reveal it to them.

Of course, an article of this length can merely suggest ways the scriptures address situations by applying creation theology. Many important texts and their corresponding issues have been left untouched. It is particularly important to note how the themes charted here continue in New Testament texts such as John 1:1-5, Colossians 1:15-20, and Revelation 21:1-8. When these and other New Testament passages are connected to their Old Testament counterparts, it is evident that the apostles maintain the long biblical habit of expounding the doctrine of creation in their day to their audiences' particular needs. Those who follow the apostles' example may well advance the church's sense of purpose, comfort, and need for wisdom, thus allowing today's faithful to join Moses, Isaiah, Amos, the psalmists, and the wisdom writers in living out the implications of the basic confession that we believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

ENDNOTES

¹See for instance Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Lit-*

erature (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) and William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride, eds., *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) for recent discussions of creation theology.

²See Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

³For a comprehensive discussion of the inspiration and authority of scripture, consult Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume 4* (Waco, TX: Word, 1979).

⁴On this point see Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume 2* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976) 9.

⁵Note the treatments of the Bible as a unity in Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God's Plan for Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1991); and R. J. Gibson, ed., *Interpreting God's Plan: Biblical Theology and the Pastor* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).

⁶Henry, 2:69.

⁷Ibid, 2:76.

⁸Of course, "canonical criticism" is most often associated with Brevard S. Childs and James Sanders. For evangelical approaches to the discipline see John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Richard Schultz, "Integrating Old Testament Theology and Exegesis: Literary, Thematic, and Canonical Issues," in Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis: Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 185-205; and House, *Old Testament Theology*.

⁹Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Towards an Exegeti-*

- cal Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981).
- ¹⁰Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: Volume 6* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 108.
- ¹¹Ibid.
- ¹²Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, III/1: The Doctrine of Creation*, trans. G.W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958) 3.
- ¹³See Henry, 6:108, and Barth, 4.
- ¹⁴Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary 1A (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996) 126.
- ¹⁵William A. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 15-16.
- ¹⁶G. C. Aalders, *Genesis: 1*, trans. William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 51.
- ¹⁷Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984) 76, 92-98.
- ¹⁸Aalders, 51.
- ¹⁹Dumbrell, 16.
- ²⁰C. F. Keil, "Genesis," in C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: 1* (n.d.; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 49.
- ²¹S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen, 1904) 4.
- ²²For the opinions of the early church on the matter consult Andrew Louth, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament: 1, Genesis 1-11* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001) 27-45. For a concise survey of opinions since the Reformation, see Mathews, 164-172.
- ²³Barth, 187.
- ²⁴Marsha M. Wilfong, "Human Creation in Canonical Context: Genesis 1:26-31 and Beyond," in William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride, eds., *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 45-46.
- ²⁵Keil, 68.
- ²⁶Fuller, 180.
- ²⁷Of course, Isaiah's original audience is a much-debated subject, and the position taken in this essay differs from the majority of Isaiah scholars. For treatments of Isaiah as an eighth-century book, consult J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 13-34; Barry R. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 160-161; and John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 3-60.
- ²⁸Webb, 175.
- ²⁹Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) 69.
- ³⁰Note Walter Brueggemann's arresting description of this choice in *Isaiah 40-66*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 84.
- ³¹Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, trans. David Stalker, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 202.
- ³²James L. Mays, *Amos*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 1-3; and Jorg Jeremias, *The Book of Amos*, trans. Douglas W. Stott, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 2.
- ³³See Gary V. Smith, *Amos: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 148-150.
- ³⁴See William Holladay, *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).
- ³⁵A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms: Volume Two, Psalms 73-150*, New Century Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 650.
- ³⁶Cf. James L. Mays, "'Maker of Heaven and Earth': Creation in the Psalms," in William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride, Jr., eds., *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 76.
- ³⁷John Hartley, *The Book of Job*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 493-497.
- ³⁸For a discussion of this translation issue, consult R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs*, New Century Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 129-130; and William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) 352-354.
- ³⁹Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1964) 78.
- ⁴⁰Robert L. Alden, *Proverbs: A Commentary on an Ancient Book of Timeless Advice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 73.
- ⁴¹Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000) 145.