



# HOW THE — BIBLE IS — WRITTEN

GARY A. RENDSBURG



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 HENDRICKSON  
PUBLISHERS

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Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC  
P. O. Box 3473  
Peabody, Massachusetts 01961-3473  
www.hendrickson.com

ISBN 978-1-68307-197-6

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*Printed in the United States of America*

*First Printing — April 2019*

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### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Rendsburg, Gary, author.

Title: How the Bible is written / Gary A. Rendsburg.

Description: Peabody, Massachusetts : Hendrickson Publishers, [2019] |

Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018053612 | ISBN 9781683071976 (alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Hebrew language--Grammar. | Bible.--Old Testament--

Language, style. | Bible. Old Testament--Criticism, interpretation, etc. |

Bible as literature.

Classification: LCC PJ4556 .R46 2019 | DDC 221.6/6--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018053612>

For Melissa



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was written over the course of seven years (2010–2017), during which time I was privileged to be granted several sabbaticals by my home institution, Rutgers University. While I love to teach, and remain energized each time I enter the lecture hall or the seminar room even after almost forty years, a book of this magnitude requires time away from the classroom for extended periods. The singular location where the largest portion of this book was written was the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Yarnton Manor (October 2010–February 2011 / June–December 2012 / June–July 2014). Those who have enjoyed the warm hospitality of the Centre and the unsurpassed allure of Yarnton Manor will understand my words here. To my mind, there is no better place in the world to conduct research in the field of Jewish studies, with easy access to the magical city of Oxford and all its treasures in one direction and to the English countryside and all its charm in the other. Alas, the Centre no longer is housed at Yarnton Manor, but I will recall my stays there with great fondness for years to come.

I also was able to spend extended periods at the University of Sydney (February–April 2011), the University of Cambridge (June–July 2015), Tyndale House (June–July 2015), and the University of California at Los Angeles (September–October 2015). I am grateful to my academic hosts at all these institutions, who afforded me library privileges, office space, accommodation, good cheer, and more.

My research has been generously funded by the Blanche and Irving Laurie Chair of Jewish History at Rutgers University. I am honored to be the inaugural holder of this chair (2004–present), and I remain grateful to the Laurie Foundation board members for their support, friendship, appreciation, and encouragement.

As I explain in the Introduction, sections of this book are based on my previously published work. Hence, I am grateful to the editors of the various journals and monographs who saw fit to publish my

articles relevant to the general topic of “How the Bible Is Written.” These essays, in turn, often were based on oral presentations of the material, delivered over the years at Johns Hopkins University, the University of Leiden, the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, Pennsylvania State University, Bar-Ilan University, and my own academic home, Rutgers University. These opportunities allowed for feedback from colleagues, always an important element in the advancement of research.

I am especially indebted to two special individuals whose diligent work made this a better book. The first is Charles Loder, who served as my research assistant for two years (2014–2016) and who has continued to assist me in manifold ways during the three years since. Charles tracked down references, read the entire manuscript in its pre-final version, read the proofs, and produced the indices and bibliography that accompany this volume. Every researcher should be as fortunate to have someone like Charles at his or her side, assisting the process at every stage.

The second is Jonathan Kline, senior editor at Hendrickson Publishers. As those who have worked with Jonathan know well, he is brilliant at shepherding a book from manuscript to finished product. He has both the technical know-how and the pleasant disposition to make the entire process a delight—all the more so in the present case, given the size of this book and the technical material (Hebrew, transliteration, etc.) inherent herein.

The pleasure of working with Charles and Jonathan was all the more gratifying because both of these young scholars were my students: Charles completed his M.A. degree with me at Rutgers University (2016), before assuming his current position as library coordinator at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; while Jonathan completed his B.A. degree with me at Cornell University (2002) en route to his graduate training and professional career.

This book is dedicated to my wife Melissa: my love, my muse, my inspiration, my everything. Our journeys together, from Concord to Highclere; our readings together, from Blake to Thoreau; indeed our life together—all is embraced within the pages of this book. You bring my dreams to reality, and you make my reality a dream.

## PERMISSIONS

Eight of the chapters appearing in the present volume are based on previously published articles. The author is grateful to the following publishers for permission to reuse this material herein:

Eisenbrauns (an imprint of Penn State University Press)—for permission to reuse the following articles, included herein as Chapters Five, Six, and Twelve, respectively:

“Alliteration in the Book of Genesis,” in Elizabeth R. Hayes and Karolien Vermeulen, eds., *Doubling and Duplicating in the Book of Genesis: Literary and Stylistic Approaches to the Text* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 79–95.

“Alliteration in the Exodus Narrative,” in Chaim Cohen et al., eds., *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 83–100.

“Repetition with Variation in Legal-Cultic Texts of the Torah,” in Shamir Yona et al., eds., *Marbeh Hokmah: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 435–63.

*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* (<http://www.jhsonline.org/>) and Gorgias Press—for permission to reuse the following article, incorporated herein as Chapter Eight:

“Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, vol. 2, article

6 (1998–1999); available at [http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article\\_12.pdf](http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_12.pdf).

Reprinted in: Ehud Ben Zvi, ed., *Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures I* (Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and Its Contexts 1; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2006), 197–213.

University Press of Maryland—for permission to reuse the following article, incorporated herein as Chapter Nine:

“Variation in Biblical Hebrew Prose and Poetry,” in Maxine L. Grossman, ed., *Built by Wisdom, Established by Understanding: Essays on Biblical and Near Eastern Literature in Honor of Adele Berlin* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2013), 197–226.

Brill—for permission to reuse the following article, incorporated herein as Chapter Thirteen:

“Marking Closure,” *Vetus Testamentum* 66 (2016): 280–303.

CDL Press for permission to reuse the following article, incorporated herein as Chapter Seventeen:

“Word Play in Biblical Hebrew: An Eclectic Collection,” in Scott B. Noegel, ed., *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Bible and in Near Eastern Literature* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2000), 137–62.

SBL Press—for permission to reuse the following article, incorporated herein as Chapter Twenty-Four:

“Style-Switching in Biblical Hebrew,” in Jeremy M. Hutton and Aaron D. Rubin, eds., *Epigraphy, Philology, and the Hebrew Bible: Methodological Perspectives on Philological and Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of Jo Ann Hackett* (SBL Ancient Near East Monographs 12; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 65–85; available at [http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/9780884140801\\_OA.pdf](http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/9780884140801_OA.pdf) via the SBL Press open access policy.

# ABBREVIATIONS

## General

ad loc.	to or at the place
B.C.E.	Before the Common Era
ca.	circa
C.E.	Common Era
cf.	confer, compare, see also
ch(s).	chapter(s)
col(s).	column(s)
def.	definition
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
esp.	especially
fem.	feminine
frg.	fragment
i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
lit.	literally
masc.	masculine
Ms.	Manuscript
n.	note
no(s).	number(s)
pl.	plural
r.	reigned
sc.	<i>scilicet</i> (namely)
sg.	singular
s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> (see under the word)
v(v).	verse(s)

viz.	<i>videlicet</i> (namely)
vol(s).	volume(s)
x	times

## Dictionaries and Reference Works

BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906).
CAT	Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, <i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places</i> , 2nd ed. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995).
DCH	David J. A. Clines, <i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> , 8 vols. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993–2011).
HALOT	M. E. J. Richardson, ed., <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000).
KB	Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, <i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros</i> , 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1985).
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), available online at <a href="http://www.oed.com/">http://www.oed.com/</a> .

## Bible Versions

BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
JPS	<i>The Holy Scriptures: According to the Masoretic Text</i> (1916)
KJV	King James Version (1611)
LXX	Septuagint
NAB	New American Bible (1970)
NIV	New International Version (1984/2011)
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible (1985)
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i> (1985)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)
REB	Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV	Revised Standard Version (1952)

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# INTRODUCTION

Learned colleagues have written books entitled *Who Wrote the Bible?*, *How to Read the Bible*, *How the Bible Became a Book*, and *How the Bible Became Holy*.<sup>1</sup> The present volume poses a different question, *How the Bible Is Written*. My goal in this book is to reveal the manner in which language is used to produce exquisite literature, no less for the ancient Israelite literati who crafted the compositions that eventually were canonized as the Bible than for William Shakespeare or Jane Austen or J. R. R. Tolkien or any other writer whose literature we admire and continue to enjoy. Which is to say, in the most simple of terms: there are many books on what the Bible says; this is a book on how the Bible says it.

To be sure, a knowledge of Hebrew is helpful in fully understanding my analysis, but my goal has been to make the material accessible to non-specialists as well. The Bible continues to be widely read by millions of Jews and Christians who attend church and synagogue on a regular (or even less than regular) basis. Its contents are well known, but the manner in which those contents are crafted is not as well understood. My intended audience in this book, accordingly, is both scholars and educated lay people. My academic colleagues, who spend their lives poring over the biblical text, hopefully will find much of value from my own close readings contained herein. But the Jewish lay reader who follows the recitation of the Torah in the synagogue each Shabbat, the Christian lay reader who knows well the church

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1. See, for example, Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1987); Marc Z. Brettler, *How to Read the Bible* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2005); Marc Z. Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York: Free Press, 2007); William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Michael L. Satlow, *How the Bible Became Holy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

lectionary, and indeed people of any faith or in fact of no faith who simply wish to know more about one of the world's great religious texts and its literary workings, also will benefit from reading these pages. To that end, each passage treated in this book is presented in the Hebrew original, in a relatively literal translation (see below), and, where appropriate, in a simplified transliteration (again, see below).

Many of us, the present author included, received an excellent education in English literature (or in some other literary corpus), as our teachers revealed to us the superb artistry introduced by the authors of the 'great books'. We reveled in the alliteration of *Beowulf*, the wordplay of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the unsurpassed poetry of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, the wit and humor of Samuel Johnson, the subtlety of Jane Austen's prose, both the pure English and the Dorset dialect of William Barnes, the colloquialisms of Mark Twain, the obscurities of Lewis Carroll, the peculiarities precipitated by the stream-of-consciousness writing of James Joyce, the dialect representation inherent in William Faulkner, the philological wizardry of J. R. R. Tolkien, and much more. And of course all the crossovers between and among these writers and their techniques. Consider, for example, the alliteration in the following definition in Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language*, to wit, "*network*: Any thing reticulated or decussated, at equal distances, with interstices between the intersections"; or the alliterations present in the opening and closing words of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, namely, "from swerve of shore to bend of bay" and "by a commodius vicus of recirculation" (both in the opening sentence) and "a way a lone a last a loved a long the" (the ending).

We, that is to say, educated readers of English literature (including British, American, and other) are generally familiar with all of the above. The most widely read 'book' in the world, however, remains the Bible—and yet, when readers open its pages, most are totally ignorant of the manner in which its language is used to create its literature. Much of this ignorance, to be sure, is due to the linguistic divide: since the Bible is written in Hebrew, most contemporary readers access the ancient text via translation into their chosen vernacular.<sup>2</sup> Though one

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2. When I refer to 'the Bible' in this work, I intend solely the Jewish canon, what some scholars call 'the Jewish Bible' or 'the Hebrew Bible' and what

must note that even readers with facility in Hebrew often miss some of the literary brilliance, until it is pointed out to them.

This lack of attention to the literary artistry of the Bible frequently is due to the goal and the expectation of the reader. For one typically approaches the biblical compositions for their moral teachings, theological insights, historical information, and the like, without considering the literary aspect of the material.

But there is so much that is missed in such a reading experience. The chief goal of the present volume, accordingly, is to bridge that divide, to bring interested readers—scholars and lay people alike—closer to the original text, with all of its literary artistry and linguistic virtuosity. For the person interested in the history of literature, the compositions of the ancient Israelite literati surely deserve greater attention. These writers are generally unknown to us by name,<sup>3</sup> but they clearly were as clever as Joyce, Johnson, and the author of *Jabberwocky*. In the pages that follow, I hope to make this point self-evident.

In order to allow both the scholar and the educated reader of the Bible in translation to follow my exposition, every verse is, as noted above, presented both in the Hebrew original and in English translation. At times the entire verse and always the key word, phrase, or clause discussed also appears in transliteration. A word about each of these three representations is in order, with the most detailed treatment coming first, the one about the Hebrew text itself.

The Hebrew original is presented in all its Masoretic garb, by which I mean the graphic representation of the oral reading tradition created by the savants of Tiberias in the ninth century C.E. Given my adherence to

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Christians commonly call ‘the Old Testament’. The vast majority of the canon is written in Hebrew, with only the following passages in Aramaic: Gen 31:47 (a two-word phrase), Jer 10:11 (a single verse), Daniel 2:4–7:28 (constituting the most substantial portion), and Ezra 4:8–6:18, 7:12–26 (quoting archival documents from the Persian government). This amounts to about ten chapters of text, compared to about 919 chapters in Hebrew.

3. The only authors whose names have been transmitted to us are the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve individuals responsible for the books known as the Minor Prophets (Hosea through Malachi). Though even here we do not know the name of one of the key writers, namely, the person responsible for the exquisite poetry and the monotheistic message of Isaiah 40–66; hence he is known in the scholarly literature simply as Second Isaiah.

the Masoretic Text (MT), I should outline here my understanding of its history and development. From the moment that a text was composed in ancient Israel, it was transmitted through a dual process: a written one and an oral one. The most telling passage in the Bible is Exod 17:14, where God instructs Moses as follows: **כָּתֹב זֶאת זִכְרוֹן בְּסֵפֶר וְשִׂים בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ** *katob zoʾt zikkaron bas-sefer wə-šim bə-ʾozne yaḥošua* ‘write this (as) a memorial in the book, and put (it) in the ears of Joshua’.<sup>4</sup> This is the first time that the root **כ-ת-ב** *k-t-b* ‘write’ is used in the Bible: but writing the text is only one step in the process, for in addition Moses is to put the text in the ears of Joshua, representative of the next generation.

If we can extrapolate from this single key example, we can reconstruct the process of both the scribal transmission of the written text and the parallel oral transmission of the reading tradition.<sup>5</sup> Professional scribes were responsible for the former, as they copied and recopied the written text over the course of centuries and even millennia, while professional tradents were responsible for the latter, as they bequeathed the proper reading of the text from one generation to the next.<sup>6</sup> The two were equally necessary, for as readers of Hebrew know, the written text is but a consonantal skeleton, with no vowels, accents, punctuation, and so on indicated. The preservers of the oral reading tradition were responsible for those features, so that they knew, to use examples from the above passage: (a) to intone the first word (written simply **כָּתֹב**) as *katob* ‘write’ (imperative form) and not as *katab* (masc. sg. past tense), *koteb* (masc. sg. active participle), or *katob* (infinitive absolute form); (b) to intone the fourth word (written simply **בְּסֵפֶר**) as *bas-sefer* ‘in the book’ (with definite article) and not as *bə-sefer* ‘in a book’ (without the article); and (c) to pause on the words **בְּסֵפֶר** *bas-sefer* ‘in the book’

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4. My use of the word ‘book’ here is simply a convention. The actual text would have been inscribed on a scroll, not what we envision by the English word ‘book’, with a binding, writing on both sides of the page, and so on.

5. For the approach outlined here, I am indebted to the little-known but superb article by Saul Levin, “The ‘Qeri’ as the Primary Text of the Hebrew Bible,” *General Linguistics* 35 (1997): 181–223.

6. The term ‘tradent’ refers to someone who passes on the tradition, in this case the oral reading tradition of the ancient Hebrew text. English has a well-known word, ‘scribe’, to refer to an individual who copies and transmits the written text, but no such word for one who learns and transmits the recitation of the text; hence I use the scholarly designation ‘tradent’ for such an individual.

(hence the comma in my translation) and יהושע *yehošuaʿ* ‘Joshua’ (which would be followed by a semicolon, were I to have continued with the rest of the verse in my translation). Multiply this passage by thousands of instances, and one can see just how remarkable the oral transmission of the text truly was. The term for this oral reading tradition in Jewish parlance is ‘Masora’, rendered best as ‘tradition’, but with specific reference to the process outlined here.

This is not to say that variant texts did not exist, for clearly they did;<sup>7</sup> but eventually a single text type emerged within the Jewish tradition, during the first millennium C.E.<sup>8</sup> Generally speaking, that text type, as scholars now recognize, was the most conservative of the variant texts in circulation. For almost always this proto-Masoretic text, as we may call it, reflects an older linguistic layer of Hebrew, a more conservative orthography (that is, spelling), and a more complex and sophisticated literary style.

Under the influence of both Islam and its devotion to the Qurʾan, and the emerging Karaite movement within Judaism, during the ninth century C.E. the Jewish scribes and tradents in the city of Tiberias in northern Israel developed a system to graphically represent the oral reading tradition that had been passed down for anywhere between ca. 1000–2000 years (depending on the age of the specific biblical book). These scholars, whom we call the Masoretes, created two sets of signs consisting of a series of dots and dashes and similar markings, one to

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7. The best evidence for variant Hebrew texts derives from the biblical manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran, dating to the second and first centuries B.C.E. Further evidence is forthcoming from the Torah as transmitted by the Samaritans (= Samaritan Torah), since it departs from the Jewish Torah in hundreds of instances. In addition, the Septuagint (= LXX = the Greek translation produced by the Jews of Alexandria in the third and second centuries B.C.E.) often reflects a different Hebrew *Vorlage* than what would emerge as the Masoretic Text. I will refer to these other textual traditions on various occasions below, in my treatments of particular passages.

8. In fact, this single text type, with only the most minor of variants, seems to have emerged relatively early in the first millennium C.E., which is to say, by the second century C.E. Evidence for this is forthcoming from the biblical manuscripts uncovered in Naḥal Ḥever, Wadi Murabbaʿat, and other nearby sites. See Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 29.

indicate the vowels and the other to simultaneously indicate where a word is to be accented and how an entire phrase, clause, or verse is to be punctuated.<sup>9</sup> The result is the masterful Masoretic Text, a product unparalleled in the history of world literature, to the best of my knowledge. The result, accordingly, was the difference between the following two representations, once more using Exod 17:14 as our example:

(a) כתב זאת זכרון בספר ושם באזני יהושע

(b) כְּתַב זֹאת זִכְרוֹן בְּסֵפֶר וְשֵׁם בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ

The former constitutes the way the text appears with only its consonantal skeleton; the latter represents the text with all its Masoretic garb.<sup>10</sup>

One additional point is worth emphasizing here: the prominence given to the oral reading tradition within Judaism, even after it was graphically represented by the Masoretic enterprise, is indicated by the Hebrew term ‘Miqra’, used for the Bible (as the canon, as a portion thereof, or even for a single passage). The etymological meaning of this word is ‘that which is read’, by which is meant ‘that which is intoned or read aloud’, hence more simply ‘the Reading’. We English speakers are accustomed to the term ‘Scripture’, meaning, for the Bible, ‘that which is written’;<sup>11</sup> but in Jewish tradition, as indicated by the term ‘Miqra’, the emphasis is on

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9. As Jewish communities around the world developed traditions of chanting the text (especially the Torah), these markings also took on a third role, serving to note the specific cantillation.

10. As experts will realize, actually there were three different Masoretic systems created during this time period: the Tiberian one, the Palestinian one (also from the land of Israel), and the Babylonian one. Eventually the Tiberian one emerged as the standard within Jewish society. To further complicate matters, even within the Tiberian system there are some minor differences between the Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali schools, though the former eventually emerged as the standard. None of this finesse need concern us here, so that when I refer to ‘the Masoretic Text’, I refer to the text type developed by the Tiberian Masorettes, especially as embodied in the two great early codices of Aleppo (ca. 920 C.E.) and St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) (dated to precisely 1008–1009 C.E., based on the information provided in the colophon).

11. Or in German, *Die Schrift* (or with adjective, *Die heilige Schrift*), and similarly in other European languages (Dutch *de Heilige Schrift*, French *les Saintes Écritures* or *l’Écriture sainte*, etc.).

that which is read, not necessarily on that which is written.<sup>12</sup> The same holds for the Qur'an in Islam, the name of which is derived from the same Semitic root, hence 'the Reading' and not 'the Scripture'; and ditto for the name of the Karaite (more properly Qaraite) movement within Judaism, with its emphasis on *Miqra*, that is, 'the Reading', the Bible.<sup>13</sup>

As indicated above, each Hebrew word, passage, or verse quoted in this book is presented in English translation. My translation method follows that of such pioneering scholars as Everett Fox and Robert Alter,<sup>14</sup> with a style slightly more in line with the former than with the latter. That is to say, I aim for a more literal rendering, one that allows the reader of this book (whether he or she knows Hebrew or not) the opportunity to follow the flow, syntax, and cadence of the Hebrew original. At times, the English may sound stilted, but frequently this reflects the Hebrew. For example, in Gen 1:11, I render the Hebrew phrase **תַדְשֵׂא הָאָרֶץ וְתַשֵּׂא** *tadše' ha-'areṣ deše'* 'let the earth vegetate vegetation' (see below, Chapter 1, p. 18), because the verb and the noun are built from the same root. The verb is atypical in Hebrew (it appears again only in Joel 2:22), though the noun is standard (occurring 14x altogether).<sup>15</sup> So the English sounds a bit odd because the Hebrew is a bit odd, and I want the reader to recognize this point. When I extend the English language

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12. In fact, in those instances where the scribal tradition and the oral reading tradition diverged during the course of their parallel transmissions, Jewish practice is to follow the latter and not the former! This demonstrates that the oral tradents were seen as more reliable than the writerly scribes. The result is what is known as the Ketiv-Qeri system (that which is written vs. that which is read), as also indicated in the Masoretic Text. See further below, Chapter 2, p. 36, n. 2.

13. This emphasis on the Bible within Karaite Judaism stands in contrast to Rabbinic Judaism, with its focus on postbiblical texts, such as the Mishna and the two Talmudim.

14. Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken, 1995); Everett Fox, *The Early Prophets* (New York: Schocken, 2014); Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Norton, 2004); Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms* (New York: Norton, 2007); Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books* (New York: Norton, 2010); and Robert Alter, *Ancient Israel* (New York: Norton, 2013).

15. This is true of postbiblical Hebrew as well, where the verb does not occur at all and the noun appears an additional 9x (5x in Qumran texts, 4x in Tannaitic texts [Mishna and Tosefta]).

in such fashion, almost always I include a justification, frequently one that is in fact based on historical evidence from the language itself.<sup>16</sup>

I borrow from Fox the technique of using a hyphenated English phrase to indicate that the Hebrew is actually a single word. Thus, for example, I use ‘dry-land’ to render  $\text{הַבְּשָׂה}$  *yabbaša* and ‘creeping-things’ to render  $\text{רִמְמֵשׁ}$  *remeš*, just to cite two nouns from Genesis 1 (on which see below, Chapter 1). Note that when I cite just a word or two (as here), I typically delete the Masoretic accent marks, especially because said markings may differ from one usage of the word to the next.

My transliteration scheme is a simplified one. Each of the consonants has a single representation, as shown on the following page.<sup>17</sup> Over time, and as preserved within the Masoretic system, six of these letters received a double pronunciation, but I have not introduced such subtlety into my transliteration system. Thus, for example,  $\text{ב}$  *bet* is always transcribed as *b*, even when it might be pronounced as [v] in certain environments according to the later Masora;  $\text{פ}$  *pe* is always transcribed as *p*, even when it might be pronounced as [f] in certain environments according to the later Masora; and so on. Since my work is situated in ancient Israel, before this development occurred, I feel justified in using the simplified system. Those who know Hebrew, of course, are free to read the passages in whatever pronunciation feels comfortable.

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16. In this particular case, note the older (now largely obsolete) usage of the verb ‘vegetate’, meaning ‘grow, develop, produce vegetation’. Today, the verb ‘vegetate’ has a different (indeed rather negative) connotation, which is not intended here naturally. For details, see *OED*, s.v. ‘vegetate’ *v*. On the importance of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), see below, pp. 10–11 and n. 18.

17. Note that each of these consonants bore a unique pronunciation during the biblical period of Iron Age Israel, and thus each of them is signified differently. Later Jewish pronunciations, especially in the Ashkenazic world, either altered or merged some of these pronunciations. My chart does not include the five final letter forms  $\text{ך}$ ,  $\text{ם}$ ,  $\text{ן}$ ,  $\text{פ}$ , and  $\text{שׁ}$  (respectively, *k*, *m*, *n*, *p*, and *š*), which are simply graphic variants and have no effect on the matter.

There are some complications to the system outlined here, however. First, as the chart indicates, the grapheme  $\text{שׁ}$  *šin/sin* represented two different sounds that were kept distinct during the biblical period. Second, though not reflected in the chart, the graphemes  $\text{הׁ}$  *het* and  $\text{יׁ}$  *ayin* also represented two distinct sounds, for which see Chapter 5, p. 81, n. 22.

Hebrew letter form	Hebrew letter name	Transliteration
א	<i>ʾaleph</i>	ʾ
ב	<i>bet</i>	<i>b</i>
ג	<i>gimel</i>	<i>g</i>
ד	<i>dalet</i>	<i>d</i>
ה	<i>he</i>	<i>h</i>
ו	<i>waw</i>	<i>w</i>
ז	<i>zayin</i>	<i>z</i>
ח	<i>ḥet</i>	<i>ḥ</i>
ט	<i>ṭet</i>	<i>ṭ</i>
י	<i>yod</i>	<i>y</i>
כ	<i>kaf</i>	<i>k</i>
ל	<i>lamed</i>	<i>l</i>
מ	<i>mem</i>	<i>m</i>
נ	<i>nun</i>	<i>n</i>
ס	<i>samekh</i>	<i>s</i>
ע	<i>ʿayin</i>	ʿ
פ	<i>pe</i>	<i>p</i>
צ	<i>ṣade</i>	<i>ṣ</i>
ק	<i>qof</i>	<i>q</i>
ר	<i>reš</i>	<i>r</i>
ש	<i>śin</i>	<i>ś</i>
ש	<i>šin</i>	<i>š</i>
ת	<i>taw</i>	<i>t</i>

My system of transcribing the vowels is even more simplified. I have not indicated length; thus, for example, *o* is used regardless of the precise realization of the vowel, in contrast to other, more detailed systems, which may distinguish *ō*, *o*, *ō*, and *ô*. None of this hyper-sophistication is necessary for our present purposes. I have, however, indicated *shewa* throughout with the siglum *ə*; and I also have taken advantage of two distinct letter forms, *e* and *ε*, in order to distinguish *šere* (..) and *segol* (.), respectively.

For the uninitiated reader, all of this may seem very arcane and difficult at times. In addition, there will be technical asides concerning phonology, cognates to Hebrew words in other Semitic languages, and more. But I would beg such a reader, especially one with an interest in text and in language, to persevere. For only through such perseverance will said reader come to marvel at all that the biblical text has to offer. The chapters ahead cover such topics as wordplay, alliteration, marking closure, form following content, repetition with variation, style-switching (or dialect representation), and the effect of placing the shorter word before the longer (along with departures from this norm)—all of which constitute the building blocks from which the biblical text is constructed. To truly know the Bible is to know this material. To put this another way, I would recommend that the reader of this work gain from it what he or she may gain, and disregard anything that he or she finds too technical.

As I stated at the outset, in writing this book I have sought to reach both an audience of scholars and an audience of interested and educated lay people. There are many asides to English literature, cinema, and more, which will serve as parallels to what I am describing within the biblical text. For example, in Chapter 24, which is devoted to ‘style-switching’, I use examples such as German ‘*mach schnell*’ in World War II movies (even when the Germans otherwise are speaking English) and the unsurpassed use of language by William Shakespeare in *Henry V* to represent the distinctive speeches of Captain Jamy the Scot, Captain Fluellen the Welshman, and Captain Macmorris the Irishman. As seen already above (p. 8, n. 16), the book is also replete with references to the English language, as recorded in the authoritative

*Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*.<sup>18</sup> Hopefully, these analogues will assist the reader in understanding what transpires within the workings of the ancient Hebrew text as well.

The topics listed above, and the others that appear in the Table of Contents and in the chapters that follow, are meant to be seen as selective. In general, I have not reviewed literary devices already well surveyed in the scholarly literature. Most importantly, this book is devoted mainly to prose, with less interest in poetry. Hence, for example, there is no chapter devoted to parallelism, especially since Adele Berlin has treated this issue from a literary-linguistic perspective in her superb monograph *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*.<sup>19</sup> What possibly could I add to her elegant statement? The term is mentioned occasionally in the work that follows, and I include a basic explanation of the phenomenon at Chapter 17, no. 2, but I have not included a sustained treatment of the subject.

If I have explored topics ‘a’, ‘b’, and ‘c’, but not topics ‘d’, ‘e’, and ‘f’, this is due largely to my own personal interests and previous publications. I have published on many of the matters discussed here, but my treatments are found in diverse articles and book chapters written over the course of several decades. The current project attempts to bring much of that information, along with new material, into a single book. One hopes, moreover, that the whole will be greater than the sum of its parts, so that the book is not seen merely as a volume of ‘collected studies’ (which it is not), but rather as a way of envisioning the multifaceted means by which the biblical authors created the texts that have come down to us from the distant past.

By and large my examples come from the most familiar of biblical texts, that is, the prose books of the Torah (Genesis and Exodus

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18. My references to the *OED* are taken from the online edition, available at <http://www.oed.com/>, to which I have ready access via the Rutgers University Libraries. All citations were checked via online access as recently as September 2018. Those without full access to the online edition may find more or less the same information in the most recent print edition (or for that matter in earlier editions).

19. Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985; 2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

especially) and other well-known prose narratives (the stories of Ruth, Samson, David, et al.). My emphasis, therefore, is on prose, especially narrative. At times I venture into the world of legal and cultic texts of the Torah, while at other times I address issues relevant to poetry (notwithstanding less focus on that genre, as indicated above). But even in such instances, I once again attempt to use more familiar passages. A glance at the Index of Biblical References at the end of the book illuminates this point well: lots of Genesis, lots of Exodus, some Leviticus, some Psalms, no Obadiah, no Malachi.<sup>20</sup>

At certain points in this book I use the expression ‘biblical author’ (or in the plural, ‘biblical authors’). I am well aware that this term is anachronistic, because at the time of the floruit of these authors, the Bible did not exist—and in fact would not exist for centuries. I use the term, accordingly, as shorthand for the author of a passage, a chapter, a story, or even an entire composition that eventually would emerge as a book of the Bible, once the canonization process commenced, starting in ca. 450 B.C.E., with the elevation of the Torah to a new status (see Nehemiah 8 especially). In other words, ‘biblical author’ is a term of convenience: said individuals almost assuredly did not consider that they were writing anything akin to what would materialize as ‘the Bible’ centuries later. The more accurate term I use is ‘ancient Israelite literati’ (ah, the alliteration), but I felt the need to mix it up a bit and vary my language (ah, variation), hence the use of ‘biblical authors’ as a stand-in term in this book.

I close here with mention of two other terms of convenience. While we know precious little, if anything, about the people who wrote the biblical books,<sup>21</sup> almost undoubtedly these individuals were men.<sup>22</sup> For

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20. True, Obadiah and Malachi appear in the Index of Biblical Passages (along with every other biblical book), but the verses registered there are not treated as primary illustrations herein. N.B. Chapter and verse numbers used herein follow the Hebrew tradition. The verse numbers used in English translations differ at times, for example, in Exodus 7–8, where Hebrew 7:26–29 = English 8:1–4, and Hebrew 8:1–28 = English 8:5–32.

21. Though see above, p. 3, n. 3, concerning the prophets.

22. Though I hasten to add that the first author known by name in the history of the world is a woman, namely, Enheduanna, high priestess of the moon-god Nanna in the city of Ur, ca. 2500 B.C.E. We possess several dozen

this reason, I will use masculine pronouns throughout to refer to the author of a text, the oral presenter of a text, the redactor of material, and so on. To balance this usage, I adopt the parallel convention of using feminine pronouns throughout to refer to the listener of the text, that is, an individual member of the audience gathered to hear the oral performance of the text.<sup>23</sup> These corresponding uses of ‘he’ and ‘she’ in this book absolve me of the need to say ‘he or she’ each time I refer to an author or a listener.

With all of the above as an introduction to the intent and purpose of this book, along with its procedures and conventions, I invite the reader to join me on the journey through the Bible’s pages, with an eye to the nexus of language and literature, commencing with Genesis 1.

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hymns written by her, the most extensive of which is ‘The Exaltation of Inanna’. Other female authors may have existed, but Enheduanna seems to have been the exception more than the rule. Moreover, the fact that we know her name may be due to her exceptional quality as a women, in contrast to the presumed maleness of the vast majority of authors.

23. On the oral reading of ancient literature, the Bible included, see Chapter 1, pp. 25–29.

## CHAPTER ONE

# READING CREATION

To repeat the comment from the Introduction: there are lots of books on what the Bible says; this is a book about how the Bible says it. And there is no better place to begin our journey into how the Bible is written than at the beginning, with Genesis 1. The opening words of the canonical text present a grammatical conundrum: **בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא** *bə-reʹšit baraʹ*, lit., ‘in-the-beginning-of he-created’ > ‘in the beginning of [God’s] creating’. The first word includes the preposition **-בְּ** *bə-* ‘in’ plus a noun in the construct state, **רֵאשִׁית** *reʹšit* ‘beginning (of)’, which according to standard Hebrew grammatical rules (in particular, one that every student of Hebrew learns early on) would demand another noun in the absolute state to follow.<sup>1</sup> Instead, however, the second word in the text is a suffix-conjugation verb in the past tense, **בָּרָא** *baraʹ* ‘he created’. We have no immediate explanation for this grammatical oddity, other than to note that this two-word phrase sets the stage for the reader to pay heed. The text she is to hear is not a simple text, built on the grammatical rules found in a primer or even an intermediate-level textbook, but rather one in which challenging linguistic issues and literary formulations abound. Rashi, the great medieval Jewish commentator, pointed to the parallel construction in Hos 1:2, **תְּחִלַּת דִּבְרֵי** *təḥillat dibber* ‘the-start-of he-spoke’ > ‘at the start of [YHWH’s]

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1. Compare, for example, Jer 27:1 **בְּרֵאשִׁית מַמְלַכַּת יְהוֹיָקִים** *bə-reʹšit mamleket yəḥoyakim* ‘in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim’; Jer 28:1 **בְּרֵאשִׁית מַמְלַכַּת בְּרִיָּה** *bə-reʹšit mamleket šidqiyya* ‘in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah’; etc. For more familiar phrases, consider **בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל** *bet yiśraʹel* ‘house of Israel’, **בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** *bəne yiśraʹel* ‘children of Israel’, **אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן** *ʹereṣ kənaʹan* ‘land of Canaan’, Rabbinic and Modern Hebrew **בֵּית כְּנֻסַּת** *bet kəneset* ‘synagogue’ (lit., ‘house of assembly’), Modern Hebrew **בֵּית סֵפֶר** *bet sefer* ‘school’ (lit., ‘house of the book’), etc.

speaking [to Hosea]’, which indeed represents an analogous syntagma,<sup>2</sup> though this does not resolve the problem—and thus the conundrum in Gen 1:1 remains nonetheless.

Naturally, when I refer to grammatical rules that one may find in a primer or even an intermediate-level textbook, I do not mean to imply that such volumes existed in ancient Israel. What I intend, rather, is to suggest that the antennae of an ancient reader of our text, a native speaker of ancient Hebrew, would have been raised upon encountering the expression **בְּרָא שָׁמַיִת בְּרָא** *bə-reʿsit baraʿ*.<sup>3</sup> What mean these words, she might have said to herself—and this at the very outset of a narrative, indeed at the very outset of a narrative that appears at the very outset of a book, which in turn one day would find its position at the very outset of a canonical text, the Torah. We will not resolve this grammatical structure here (other than to note that Hos 1:2 is not the only parallel; there are others in the Bible),<sup>3</sup> but I repeat the notion that a native speaker would have raised an eyebrow at this starting point in the narrative—and indeed one can only imagine how she would have interpreted the phrase.

As we proceed with Genesis 1, the reader notices the appearance of several refrains. For each act of creation (one per day on days one, two, four, and five; two per day on days three and six) the text begins with the phrase **וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים** *wayyoʿmer ʿelohim* ‘and God said’. Next, once the desired act is accomplished, the text informs us that God saw **כִּי טוֹב** *ki tob* ‘that it was good’ (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). And then finally, we read for each day of creation **וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר** *wayhi ʿereb wayhi boqer* ‘and it was evening and it was morning’, plus the appropriately numbered day of creation (vv. 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

Except wait—the second of these refrains does not occur on day two! And so again the reader of this text must ponder a question, not a linguistic anomaly, but rather a literary curiosity. Why would the author of our text have omitted mention of the fact that God saw the creation of the **רָקִיעַ** *raqiaʿ* ‘firmament’ (named more simply **שָׁמַיִם** *šamayim* ‘sky, heaven’; see v. 8) as good? The answer lies in the fact that the object

2. For another instance of the same syntagma, see below, Chapter 15, no. 10.

3. For example, Isa 29:1 **דָּוִד חָנָה קִרְיַת חָנָה** *qiryat ḥana dawid* ‘the-city-of camped David’ > ‘the city (where) David camped’, an epithet for Jerusalem.

of God's creative activity on day two was the water. A close reading of vv. 1–3 (especially v. 2) reveals that water was preexistent matter, in the form of the deep (Hebrew תְּהוֹם *təhom*)—which is to say, water is never created in Genesis 1, but rather is the dominant presence on the earth, comprised of תְּהוֹ וְבוּהוּ *tohu wa-bohu* 'wild and waste' (v. 2).<sup>4</sup> This water, in turn, represents the cosmic sea or abyss, which in other ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies (most famously, the Babylonian story *Enuma Elish*) is symbolized by an evil deity (for example, the goddess Tiamat in said story).<sup>5</sup> In short, water, in the form of the salt water that covers the surface of the earth, is seen as an evil force. After all, this salt water is of no use: one cannot drink it, one's animals will not drink it, and one cannot irrigate with it. In addition, the ocean is a potent force, which can wreck ships and destroy coastlines; most of us have witnessed the stormy sea and know its destructive power, and thus can understand why the ancients envisaged the watery mass in a negative light.

All of this is background for the omission of the second refrain noted above on day two. God creates the רָקִיעַ *raqia'* 'firmament', which serves to separate the waters above and the waters below. And while there is nothing inherently negative about this created element, since the waters were acted upon, so to speak (and note the fivefold use of the word מַיִם *mayim* 'water' in the three verses that comprise the description of day two), the author intentionally omits the declaration וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב *wayyar' 'elohim ki tob* 'and God saw that it was good' in his description of day two.

When we turn to day three, we are able to identify yet another element of our author's literary virtuosity, namely, his desire not to repeat phrases. A comparison of vv. 11–12 reveals an array of minor differences between the command (v. 11) and fulfillment (v. 12) regarding the creation of vegetation.<sup>6</sup>

4. I here borrow Everett Fox's rendering of the two-word Hebrew phrase.

5. Note that Babylonian *tiamat* is cognate to Hebrew תְּהוֹם *təhom* 'deep, abyss', which, notwithstanding the lack of a feminine ending, is a feminine noun in Hebrew.

6. Here and elsewhere, when appropriate, I have formatted the Hebrew text in a way that allows the reader to compare more readily the corresponding phrase and expressions.

## Genesis 1:11–12

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים <sup>11</sup>

תְּדַשָּׂא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינֹו  
אֲשֶׁר זֶרַע-וּבוֹ עַל-הָאָרֶץ  
וַיְהִי-כֵן:

וַתוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֵשֶׂה-פְּרִי <sup>12</sup>

אֲשֶׁר זֶרַע-וּבוֹ לְמִינֵהוּ  
וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב:

<sup>11</sup> And God said, “Let the earth vegetate vegetation, plants that seed seed, fruit trees that produce fruit (each) according to its kind with its seed in it, upon the earth”; and it was so.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>12</sup> And the earth brought-forth vegetation, plants that seed seed (each) according to its kind, and trees that produce fruit with its seed in it (each) according to its kind; and God saw that it was good.

An uncreative author could simply have repeated the phraseology in v. 11 in his wording of v. 12, or perhaps he could have omitted the verse altogether, especially since the last two words of v. 11 already indicate וַיְהִי-כֵן *wayhi ken* ‘and it was so’. But our ingenious writer desires to show off his talent, and this stage in the narrative appears to be an apt opportunity.

A comparison of vv. 11 and 12 reveals the following distinctions: (a) different verbs serving as the predicate of the subject הָאָרֶץ *ha-’areš* ‘the earth’; (b) the wording עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה פְּרִי *’eš pāri ‘oše pāri* ‘fruit trees that produce fruit’ in the former versus the shorter וְעֵץ עֵשֶׂה-פְּרִי *wə-’eš ‘oše pāri* ‘and trees that produce fruit’ in the latter, though this time preceded by conjunctive -וּ *wə-* ‘and’; (c) the placement of the single occurrence of לְמִינֹו *lə-mino* ‘according to its kind’ in v. 11 versus the placement of the first לְמִינֵהוּ *lə-minehu* ‘according to its kind’ in v. 12, not to mention the use of a second instance of לְמִינֵהוּ *lə-minehu* ‘according to its kind’ in v. 12; and (d) perhaps the most instantly recognizable difference, namely, the

7. On my use of the verb ‘vegetate’ in the translation, see above, Introduction, p. 8, n. 16.

variant forms לְמִינוֹ *la-mino* and לְמִינֵהוּ *la-minehu*, both meaning ‘according to its kind’ (the first is the standard form, the second is more archaic).<sup>8</sup>

But wait, there is more! When the vegetation is referenced again in v. 29, at the point where God grants the first human couple the plants of the earth to eat, we note still other variations.

## Genesis 1:29

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים  
הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב | זֶרַע זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ  
וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ פְּרִי־עֵץ זֶרַע זֶרַע  
לָכֶם יְהִי לְאֹכֶלָה:

And God said, “Behold, I give to you all the plants that seed seed that are on the face of all the earth, and all trees that have in it the fruit of the tree that seed seed; for you they will be food.”

Here we note: (a) אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ פְּרִי־עֵץ *’ašer bo p̄ari ‘eš* ‘that have in it the fruit of the tree’ instead of אֲשֶׁר זֶרַע־בּוֹ *’ašer zar‘o bo* ‘with its seed in it’ of vv. 11–12; and (b) the twofold use of זֶרַע זֶרַע *zorea‘ zera‘* ‘seed seed’, using the Qal participle, in place of the earlier מְזַרְיַע זֶרַע *mazria‘ zera‘* ‘seed seed’ in vv. 11–12, using the Hiph‘il participle, with no apparent lexical distinction.<sup>9</sup>

8. This is an apposite place to mention Robert J. Ratner, “Morphological Variation in Biblical Hebrew Rhetoric,” in Robert J. Ratner et al., eds., *Let Your Colleagues Praise You: Studies in Memory of Stanley Gevirtz*, Part II = *Maarav* 8 (1992): 143–59. Ratner’s fine essay is devoted to smaller items revealing variation, whereas the present study focuses on larger matters of phraseology—though to be sure, some of the former serve the latter (e.g., the morphological variants just mentioned, to wit, לְמִינוֹ *la-mino* and לְמִינֵהוּ *la-minehu* in Gen 1:11–12). As such, one might say that the current study is Ratner writ large. Moreover, virtually everything that Ratner states in his essay, especially the concluding thoughts (157–59)—for example, the comment that “the authors considered them [sc. the variations in language] to be an enhancement of the reading and listening pleasure” (159)—applies to the current discussion as well.

9. Qal and Hiph‘il refer to two different forms that the Hebrew verb may take. The former is the basic form, while the latter bears a causative

Now, why would our author engage in such minor changes while composing the narrative? The answer, to my mind, is simply variation for the sake of variation. A mind game, as it were, is present. The author, through the text that he created and the performer who presents the text orally, entertains his reader, who consumes the text aurally, as she listens attentively to the oral performance (more on this aspect of ancient literature later). In short, there are no hidden meanings or esoteric significances to these minor changes. Rather, they are present in the text as part of the very fabric from which it is created.

Naturally, if our author is able to accomplish this variation in his description of the vegetation, we would expect him to do the same with his account of the creation of the animals. We are not disappointed. The same command-and-fulfillment approach is used in vv. 24–25, which read as follows:<sup>10</sup>

### Genesis 1:24–25

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים <sup>24</sup>

תּוֹצֵא אֶרֶץ אֲרָץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ בְּהֵמָה וְרִמָּשׁ וְחַיִּת־אֲרָץ לְמִינָהּ

וַיְהִי־כֵן:

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים <sup>25</sup>

אֶת־חַיִּת הָאֲרָץ לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת כָּל־רִמָּשׁ הָאֲדָמָה

לְמִינָהּ

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים בֵּי־טוֹב:

<sup>24</sup> And God said, “Let the earth bring-forth living beings (each) according to its kind, beasts and creeping-things, and animals of the earth (each) according to its kind”; and it was so.

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connotation. Thus, for example, if a verbal root means ‘eat’ in the Qal, it will mean ‘cause to eat’ > ‘feed’ in the Hiph‘il, and similarly with verbs meaning ‘come’ ~ ‘cause to come’ > ‘bring’; ‘go out’ ~ ‘cause to go out’ > ‘bring out’; etc. In the present instance, however, the Hiph‘il form in v. 29 connotes the same as the Qal verbs in vv. 11–12.

10. Once more I have presented the Hebrew text in a way that allows the reader to easily compare the key passages.

<sup>25</sup> And God made the animals of the earth (each) according to its kind, and the beasts (each) according to its kind, and all the creeping-things of the soil (each) according to its kind; and God saw that it was good.

It is difficult for us to judge the various nuances in some of the terms used in these verses (and thus another scholar's rendering may be slightly different), but we can state the following, with an emphasis on the different wordings. (a) The command line includes the general term *נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה* *nepeš hayya* 'living beings', which is then subdivided into three classes, in this order: *בְּהֵמָה* *bəhema* 'beasts', *רֶמֶשׂ* *remeš* 'creeping-things', and *חַיְתוֹ-אָרֶץ* *hayto 'ereš* 'animals of the earth'. In the fulfillment line, the aforementioned general term is omitted, and we then read the three subdivisions in different order: first *חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ* *hayyat ha-'areš* 'the animals of the earth', then *הַבְּהֵמָה* *hab-bəhema* 'the beasts', and finally *כָּל-רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה* *kol remeš ha-'adama* 'all the creeping-things of the soil'. (b) In v. 11, the three terms appear without the definite article; in v. 12, they appear with the definite article. (c) In the first iteration, we have only two instances of the phrase '(each) according to its kind', while in the second iteration, we have three such expressions. (d) The author uses the archaic phrase *חַיְתוֹ-אָרֶץ* 'animals of the earth' in v. 24, which is then replaced by the standard expression *חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ* 'the animals of the earth' in v. 25. (e) The simple word *רֶמֶשׂ* *remeš* 'creeping-things' in v. 24 is changed to the more complex phrase *כָּל-רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה* *kol remeš ha-'adama* 'all the creeping-things of the soil' in v. 25.

But wait, once again there is more! The animals are mentioned again in v. 30, for they too are granted the vegetation for food. Here one reads:

### Genesis 1:30

וּלְכָל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וּלְכָל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכָל | רֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ  
נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֶת-כָּל-יֵרֶק עֹשֶׂב לְאֲכֹלָהּ וַיְהִי-כֵן:

“And to all the animals of the earth and to all the fowl of heaven and to all that creeps on the earth, in which is a living being, [I give] all the green plants for food”; and it was so.

Which is to say: the one category has been changed to כָּל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ *kol hayyat ha-'areš* 'all the animals of the earth', and the other has been changed to כָּל רוֹמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ *kol romes 'al ha-'areš* 'all that creeps on the earth' (note the use of a verb now), while the third ('beasts') is lacking altogether! And while we are contending with this verse, let us also note that our author introduces a new word for vegetation, namely, יָרֵק *yereq* 'green', a lexeme hitherto not encountered—just to keep the reader further on her toes.

In addition, since they too eat plants, the birds, which were created on day five, are mentioned here as well—though yes, you guessed it, with an expression not previously encountered. In the day five account, the author placed into God's mouth the words עוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל־הָאָרֶץ *'op yo'ep 'al ha-'areš* 'let fowl fly over the earth' (v. 20); and then upon their creation he referred to them as כָּל־עוֹף בְּנֵף לְמִינֵהוּ *kol 'op kanap la-minehu* 'all winged fowl (each) according to its kind' (v. 21). The next time we hear of them, in v. 30 (see above), yet a different wording is used: כָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם *kol 'op haš-šamayim* 'all the fowl of the heaven'.

The lesson derived from the detailed analysis presented in the foregoing paragraphs is as adumbrated above: our ancient author would go to any length in order not to repeat himself. At every turn he introduced variation into his text, sometimes of very minor significance, sometimes of greater significance—but variation always. He clearly took pleasure in demonstrating his virtuosity in this way. Though now we can expand the discussion to include the consumer of this ancient text. After all, an author's display of his agility with words is most likely intended not just to please himself, but his audience as well. And if that is so, then we also must conclude that the members of his audience were able to both recognize the variations inherent in Genesis 1 and appreciate the author's remarkable skill and accomplishment. More importantly, let us recall that one listening to an ancient text processed the words aurally only. We, as modern readers of the Bible, are able to check the variations by comparing and contrasting parallel passages in writing, by checking each phrase against the other (as often as we would like), or by working through the listings presented above. The ancient reader, by contrast, was really an 'ancient listener', and she needed to process all of the information noted above while listening to the text. While listening to a presenter of Genesis 1 who had reached, say,

v. 30, a member of the audience could not go back to have a look at vv. 24–25 to recall how the creeping things were expressed. She simply would have known, I would aver, that the wording in all three cases was different. She would, moreover, have delighted in the pleasure.<sup>11</sup>

We turn now to another feature of Genesis 1, triggered by the wording in Gen 1:16, relevant to the creation of the luminaries on day four:

### Genesis 1:16

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים  
אֶת־הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים לְמִמְשָׁלַת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־הַמְּאֹרֹת הַקְּטָן לְמִמְשָׁלַת  
הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים:

And God made the two great lights; the greater light for the rule of day, and the smaller light for the rule of night, and the stars.

While seen most visibly in this verse, the point is true of the entirety of vv. 14–19, which concern day four: nowhere in these verses does the author use the common nouns שֶׁמֶשׁ *šemeš* ‘sun’ and יָרֵחַ *yareah* ‘moon’. The reason is almost without a doubt due to a desire to avoid these words, because they evoke the names of pagan deities, worshipped in the local Canaanite culture as Shamash and Yarikh, the sun and moon deities, respectively, as known most importantly from the Ugaritic myths that feature both characters. That is to say, the author of Genesis 1 did not wish for an innocent reader to come away with the impression that the single God whom the people of Israel worshipped was responsible for the creation of pagan deities.

Once we have recognized the point here, in v. 16, we gain an understanding of the wording in vv. 9–10, which describe the first half of God’s creative activity on day three:

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11. Various animal terms also appear in vv. 26 and 28, and almost all of these occur with yet other variant phraseology. I refrain from presenting the details (lest I be accused of “overkill”) and instead direct the reader to these passages to discover the alterations—and thereby the joy, hopefully—for herself.

## Genesis 1:9–10

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקְוּוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל־מְקוֹם אֶחָד וַתֵּרָא  
 הַיַּבְשָׁה וַיְהִי־כֵן:<sup>9</sup>  
 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים | לַיַּבְשָׁה אֶרֶץ וּלְמִקְוֵה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים וַיֵּרָא  
 אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב:<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> And God said, “Let the water be gathered from below the heaven into one place, and let the dry-land be seen”; and it was so.

<sup>10</sup> And God called the dry-land ‘earth’, and the collection of water he called ‘seas’; and God saw that it was good.

The waters are to be collected ‘into one place’ (v. 9), and yet this collection of waters is called *yammim* ‘seas’ (v. 10), in the plural. All the other objects created receive names in the singular, including ‘day’ (v. 5), ‘night’ (v. 5), ‘heaven’ (v. 8),<sup>12</sup> and ‘earth’ (v. 10). The answer to this enigma once more has to do with ancient deities, for Yamm was another member of the ancient Canaanite pantheon, the powerful sea-god who serves as an adversary to Ba‘al. The author of Genesis 1, accordingly, opted for the plural form *yammim* ‘seas’. True, the phrase *dəgat hay-yam* ‘the fish of the sea’ occurs in vv. 26, 28, with ‘sea’ in the singular. But note the presence of the definite article in this construction, which serves to distance our word from the name of the Canaanite sea-god, along with the fact that the ancient Hebrew brain may have processed the entire phrase<sup>13</sup> as a single “word.”<sup>14</sup>

Variation also serves a very specific function in the Bible. Ancient Hebrew style often called for alternative language to mark closure, that is, to inform the reader that she has reached the end of a particu-

12. Admittedly, in this case the Hebrew noun is dual, or perhaps what we may call a pseudo-dual (since ‘heaven’ is not quite like ‘hand’, ‘feet’, ‘eyes’, etc., which are real dual nouns), which cannot appear in either the singular or the plural—but the point still stands.

13. What scholars call a ‘construct phrase’; see above regarding Gen 1:1.

14. On the issue of identifying a single ‘word’, in particular in the mind of a traditional Serbo-Croatian *guslar*, see Raymond F. Person, “The Ancient Israelite Scribe as Performer,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 601–9, esp. 603–4.

lar pericope. Such language is found in Genesis 1, particularly in the verses that complete day six of creation and thus conclude the entire narrative. Several examples are present. First, during the first five days of creation, the names of the days of the week are presented without the definite article, thus: יום אֶחָד *yom 'eḥad* ‘day one’ (v. 5), יום שֵׁנִי *yom šeni* ‘a second day’ (v. 8), יום שְׁלִישִׁי *yom šališi* ‘a third day’ (v. 13), יום רְבִיעִי *yom rabi'i* ‘a fourth day’ (v. 19), and יום חֲמִישִׁי *yom ḥamiši* ‘a fifth day’ (v. 23).<sup>15</sup> For the final day of creation, however, we read יום הַשְּׁשִׁי *yom haš-šiši* ‘the sixth day’ (v. 31), with the definite article.

Similarly, one of the other refrains noted above is changed. Instead of the usual כִּי־טוֹב *ki tob* ‘that it was good’ (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), to conclude the account the author writes וַהֲרִיב־טוֹב מְאֹד *wə-hinne tob mə'od* ‘and behold, very good’ (v. 31) (or in more fluid English, ‘and behold, it was very good’) with two discernible differences: (a) The particle כִּי *ki* ‘that’ is changed to וַהֲרִיב *wə-hinne* ‘and behold’; and (b) the word טוֹב *tob* ‘good’ receives the adverb מְאֹד *mə'od* ‘very’.<sup>16</sup>

IMPORTANT DIGRESSION: By this point, you may be wondering whether it was indeed possible for the ancient reader of Genesis 1 to apprehend all of the literary devices inherent in the text, as delineated herein. My view on the matter is as follows, rehearsing some of the remarks above. If the author went to the trouble of interweaving all these items into his text, then one would imagine that yes, a considerable number of his audience members would have grasped and understood well all that he was attempting to accomplish.

Let us compare a modern movie director, for example. Does everyone who attends the cinema catch every nuance, especially during

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15. Standard Hebrew usage calls for the cardinal number ‘one’ in this instance, as opposed to the ordinal number ‘first’ (for another instance, see Gen 2:11–14, where the rivers of Eden are enumerated). Accordingly, the ordinals commence only with ‘second’. My glosses include the indefinite article ‘a’, which is necessary in English, though note that there is no such part of speech in Hebrew.

16. Ancient Jewish exegesis made much of the addition of מְאֹד *mə'od* ‘very’ in Gen 1:31, reading all sorts of meaning into the word. To my mind, however, we can explain the usage as simply another instance of variation, though with the specific function of marking closure.

the first viewing? No. But upon watching a film repeatedly, one sees things that one did not notice during a previous viewing. This is certainly my experience, and yes, there are films that I watch again and again. And this is my sense with the compositions that eventually found their way into the books of the Bible. These texts were the national literature of the people of ancient Israel, whose lives were not encumbered with all that we may have filling our “personal hard drives.” In fact, research by anthropologists and folklore specialists into certain contemporary cultures still largely untouched by modernity reveals that consumers of texts can be very sophisticated in their understanding of literature.

One of the best examples of such individuals are the Somalis, among whom poetry continues to be appreciated as a traditional art form via oral performance. In fact, many Somalis, especially the poets and reciters (who may be one and the same at times), know their native poetic corpus intimately. B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis wrote as follows:

Unaided by writing they learn long poems by heart and some have repertoires which are too great to be exhausted even by several evenings of continuous recitation. Moreover, some of them are endowed with such powers of memory that they can learn a poem by heart after hearing it only once, which is quite astonishing, even allowing for the fact that poems are chanted very slowly, and important lines are sometimes repeated. The reciters are not only capable of acquiring a wide repertoire but can store it in their memories for many years, sometimes for their lifetime. We have met poets who at a ripe age could still remember many poems which they learnt in their early youth.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, it is not only the poets/reciters who have this ability: in public gatherings those listening to the poems often will correct the reciter if he makes a mistake. In the words of Andrzejewski and Lewis: “moreover, among the audience there are often people who already know by heart the particular poem, having learnt it from another

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17. B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis, *Somali Poetry: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 45.

source. Heated disputes sometimes arise between a reciter and his audience concerning the purity of his version.”<sup>18</sup>

If I may be permitted my little fantasy, I like to envision the people of ancient Israel similarly. Gathered around the campfire (in a pastoral setting) or at the piazza inside the city-gate complex (in an urban setting),<sup>19</sup> one can imagine groups enjoying the recital of texts, as part of their national heritage, indeed, as entertainment—with all religious overtones and implications set aside for the moment. And when a particular point was debated, as with the contemporary Somalis, one can imagine the discussion that ensued.

I proceed, accordingly, here and throughout this volume with the assumption that the people of ancient Israel had an uncanny appreciation for belles lettres. Certain small countries have made major contributions in certain fields (such as the Irish with poetry and the Dutch and Flemish with painting, and with a concomitant appreciation thereof by the populace at large). In like fashion, I see the people of ancient Israel totally immersed in their national literature.

And while I cannot cite an academic study on the matter, my travels and life experience have informed me that even ordinary readers in certain countries know their national poets well, can recite the poetry by heart, and are able to thoroughly understand and analyze both the style and the contents. Here I have in mind, for example, the Irish with W. B. Yeats, the Scots with Robert Burns, the Russians with Alexander Pushkin, the Iranians with Rumi and Ferdowsi, and no doubt many more examples, perhaps less known to me and the readers of this book.

One question for which we cannot supply a satisfactory answer is the following: Did the ancient Israelite reciters, performers, and presenters recite/perform/present the text from memory (see above, regarding the contemporary Somali reciters), or did they hold a written

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18. *Ibid.*, 46. Other well-known examples of such ‘singers of tales’ are the Serbo-Croatian *guslar* reciters, studied by Milman Parry and described by Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 24; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960); and the Uzbek *bakshy* reciters (among others), described by Nora K. Chadwick and Victor Zhirmunsky, *Oral Epics of Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

19. The former is suggested by Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 114.

text in front of them, to serve as their guide? Possibly both options were available.<sup>20</sup> Based on the research of scholars who have investigated oral performance, clearly reciters could commit large chunks of text to memory, to be tapped when necessary. At the same time, though, we know that ancient Near Eastern literature was written down, on papyrus (in the case of Egypt and Canaan)<sup>21</sup> and on clay tablets (in the case of Ugarit, Mesopotamia, etc.). Generally speaking, I will assume the latter option, to wit, an ancient Israelite reciter holding the written text, which served as a mere skeleton (long before the development of the Masoretic apparatus [see above, pp. 3–7]), but which served him (and by extension his audience) during the oral performance. At times, as we shall see, the written version includes visual plays, which only the person holding the text would appreciate. I admit that this does not constitute foolproof evidence for the ‘written text’ hypothesis, but to my mind it certainly points in that direction.

Since I am assuming here an *oral* reading of the text, I should add a comment or two about this aspect of ancient literature. For moderns, reading is largely a silent affair, a task performed by the eyes before the text is decoded and processed by the brain. For the ancients, however, reading was an aural experience: one *heard* the text before it was processed by the brain.<sup>22</sup>

One proof for this point is the following oft-cited comment by Augustine (354–430 C.E.) regarding his senior colleague Ambrose, bishop of Milan (340–397 C.E.): “When he read, his eyes scanned the page and his heart sought out the meaning, but his voice was silent and his

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20. There is, of course, the following key difference: the Somali, Serbo-Croatian, Uzbek, and other materials mentioned above are poems, whereas much of the biblical literature discussed herein is written in narrative prose (on which see below, Chapter 21). It may be easier to commit poetry to memory than prose, but I set that issue aside for the moment.

21. At a later time, starting in the Persian period, the Israelites began to write their literature on parchment scrolls. Such remains the practice among Jews to the present day, in particular for texts used for liturgical purposes (the Torah, Esther, etc.).

22. This activity persists in the manner in which young children listen to stories, read to them by parents, teachers, and others. Eventually, however, from kindergarten onward, they learn to read silently, and the experience of aurally processing books becomes less and less frequent.

tongue was still. Anyone could approach him freely and guests were not commonly announced, so that often, when we came to visit him, we found him reading like this in silence, for he never read aloud” (*Confessions*, Book 6, ch. 3).<sup>23</sup> From Augustine’s observation, it is patently clear that Ambrose’s ability to read silently was something at which to marvel, even as late as the fourth century C.E.; for the norm, as we have indicated, was to read a text aloud.

To return to the Hebrew realm, two observations may be raised to demonstrate the same point for ancient Israel. The first is the very simple observation that the Hebrew verb קרא *q-r-*’ means both ‘call aloud’ (its primary designation) and ‘read’ (its derived connotation). The second is the statement in Isa 29:18 וְשָׁמְעוּ בַיּוֹם הַהוּא הַחֲרָשִׁים דְּבָרַי סֵפֶר *wəšam‘u bay-yom ha-hu’ ha-ḥeršim dibre sefer* ‘and on that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book’. In the topsy-turvy world that the prophet describes (vv. 17–20), the Lebanon will become choice farmland, the blind will see, tyrants will cease, the poor will rejoice in Yahweh, and the deaf will gain the ability to hear.

In our contemporary society, where reading is mainly a visual activity, it is the blind who are handicapped and who require special assistance (through Braille mainly), while the deaf are able to read. In ancient Israel, by contrast, where reading was largely an aural activity, the blind could “read,” by *listening* to an oral presentation, whereas the deaf could not.<sup>24</sup>

Back now to the first creation account: We conclude our detailed analysis of the Bible’s first story with an eye to the three verses that describe day seven of creation, Gen 2:1–3. Two of the devices already expounded occur in these verses. First we note the variation present in the non-verbatim repetition of the key phrase:<sup>25</sup>

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23. I quote the text from Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Viking, 1996), 42—with much more valuable information on the topic to be found throughout Chapter 2, “The Silent Readers” (41–53).

24. With the increased use of audiobooks in our society, certainly among the blind, but even among sighted people, contemporary people are recapturing a bit of the ancient experience of oral/aural reading.

25. These words will be familiar to traditionally minded Jewish readers, since these verses are used to introduce the Kiddush (the sanctification of the

## Genesis 2:2a

מְלֹאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

his work that he had made

## Genesis 2:2b

מִכָּל־מְלֹאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:

from all his work that he had made

## Genesis 2:3

מִכָּל־מְלֹאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת:

from all his work that God created in making

These three phrases summarize God's creative activity during the six days of creation. So as not to repeat the same words in v. 2, the author introduces the word כָּל *kol* 'all' in the latter part of the verse—though this simple adjustment only sets the stage for the splash of linguistic talent in what follows. For after rehearsing the phrase מְלֹאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר *mik-kol mala'kto 'asher* 'from all his work that', found in both v. 2b and v. 3, the author then (a) changes the verb from עָשָׂה '*asa* 'he made' to בָּרָא *bara* 'he created'; (b) introduces the explicit nominal subject אֱלֹהִים '*elohim* 'God'; and (c) ends the passage with the infinitive לַעֲשׂוֹת *la'asot* 'to make', thereby constructing a peculiar syntagma, one that rings a bit strange to the Hebrew ear. This last point speaks to one made earlier: the ancient author went to great lengths to vary his wording, even to the extent of fashioning a most unusual phraseology. For it is often via the abnormal that one's attention is captured, as exemplified by this instance.

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Sabbath), recited each Friday night over wine. I invite said readers to ponder these words more carefully, taking note of the variation with repetition, which so characterizes biblical literature.

The second technique utilized in these verses is the absence of the word שַׁבָּת *šabbat* ‘Sabbath’. One encounters the expressions בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי *bay-yom haš-šabi’i* ‘on the seventh day’ (2x) and יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי *yom haš-šabi’i* ‘the seventh day’ (1x), but the critical word ‘Sabbath’ is wanting. If this institution was so central to ancient Israelite culture and religion (as it clearly was, based on its mention in the Decalogue [Exodus 20 // Deuteronomy 5] and its position at the head of the calendar in texts such as Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28–29),<sup>26</sup> why is the word not used at the start of the Torah in Gen 2:1–3? The answer is the same one offered above for the non-mention of ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ and the use of plural ‘seas’ instead of singular ‘sea’, for Shabbat (or Shabbatay) is the classical Hebrew word for the planet Saturn, which naturally was worshipped as a god by the ancients.<sup>27</sup> As we saw earlier, the author of our text wished to avoid any mention of pagan deities—to the extent even of not incorporating the key word ‘Sabbath’ into his prose. The ancient reader, meanwhile, no doubt would have understood.

We have spent a good portion of our analysis describing intricate details about the language used to create Genesis 1:1–2:3. We now pull back the lens to reveal one more aspect of this well-known composition. As the chart below demonstrates, the first creation story contains a well-crafted literary structure:

Day 1: Light	Day 4: Lights
Day 2: Sky (and Water)	Day 5: Fish and Fowl
Day 3a: Dry Land	Day 6a: Land Animals
Day 3b: Vegetation	Day 6b: Humans
Day 7: Sabbath	

26. The reader will be interested to learn that Sabbath is also mentioned in a Hebrew inscription discovered at Mešad Hašavyahu in Israel. For more information, see Shmuel Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 156–63, esp. 161.

27. We are most familiar with the Roman god by that name, but the worship of the planet Saturn in the form of a deity goes back to the ancient Near East as well.

The first set of three days is paralleled by the second set of three days. Above we gave a cogent explanation for the non-use of the words ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ in day four. In their place, the author refers to these items as שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים *šəne ham-ma’orot hag-gadolim* ‘the two great lights’, i.e., הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים לְמִשְׁלַת הַיּוֹם *ham-ma’or hag-gadol la-memšelet hay-yom* ‘the great light for the rule of day’ and הַמְּאֹרֹת הַקְּטָנִים לְמִשְׁלַת הַלַּיְלָה *ham-ma’or haq-qaton la-memšelet hal-layla* ‘the small light for the rule of night’. These circumlocutions not only avoid the need to use the basic words ‘sun’ and ‘moon’, but they also allow the reader to hear the basic word אֹר *’or* ‘light’ over and again, thereby creating a lexical link back to day one. Indeed, the word אֹר *’or* ‘light’ occurs 5x in Gen 1:3–5, just as the word מְאֹר *ma’or* ‘light’ (in the sense of ‘luminary’) occurs 5x (in both singular and plural forms) in Gen 1:14–16.

On day two, water is the main object of God’s creative act—though as we have noted, it was not actually created, but rather was bounded by the formation of the firmament, called ‘sky, heaven’, used to separate the waters into those above and those below. In the corresponding day five, accordingly, fish and fowl are created. As one would expect, the words מַיִם *mayim* ‘water’ and שָׁמַיִם *šamayim* ‘sky, heaven’ occur in both paragraphs.

Both day three and day six contain two stages to creation. On the former, the dry land and the vegetation are created; on the latter, the land animals and the humans, which live on the dry land and eat the vegetation, are created. The correspondence is self-evident, and as we saw above, the description of the vegetation reverberates in the descriptions of days three and six (with consummate variation, of course).

Finally, crowning the six days of creative activity is day seven, the Sabbath, which naturally lacks a corresponding day, for it has no equal.

The result is a blueprint for creation. One of the major points that the narrative as a whole wishes to impart is the manner in which God created an orderly world out of preexistent chaos. The latter is indicated most of all by the expression תְּהוֹ וְבוֹהוּ *tohu wa-bohu* ‘wild and waste’ (v. 2). As the action proceeds, God brings order into said world, indicated perhaps most of all by the fivefold use of the root ב-ד-ל *b-d-l* ‘separate, divide’ (vv. 4, 6, 7, 14, 18). Imagine the negative impression you would gain were you to enter my office and find a chaotic desktop, filled with ‘wild and waste’ comprised of indiscriminate piles of books, papers, and

more. Imagine the very different impression you would gain were you to enter the next day and find that I had organized everything, dividing these books that belong here from those books that belong there, separating papers connected to my research from my students' papers relevant to my course instruction, and so on. So it is with Genesis 1. There is a blueprint to creation, which the literary structure signifies. Add to this design the refrains that repeat (even when one is omitted, for the reason stated above), and one senses even greater orderliness. The result is a brilliant example of "form follows content" (to use the literary term) or "form follows function" (to use the architectural term).<sup>28</sup> God created an orderly universe; the author of Genesis 1 fashioned an orderly narrative.

This opening chapter gives you a sense of our overall approach. The texts of the Hebrew Bible are about three thousand years old (on dating, see Chapter 21), and yet in no way should they be considered simple tales. At every turn they reveal a deep literary sophistication. Our ancient author, anonymous though he may be, was a master of language and a brilliant literary craftsman. His audience no doubt appreciated his every effort.

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28. We will explore this literary device further in Chapter 27.