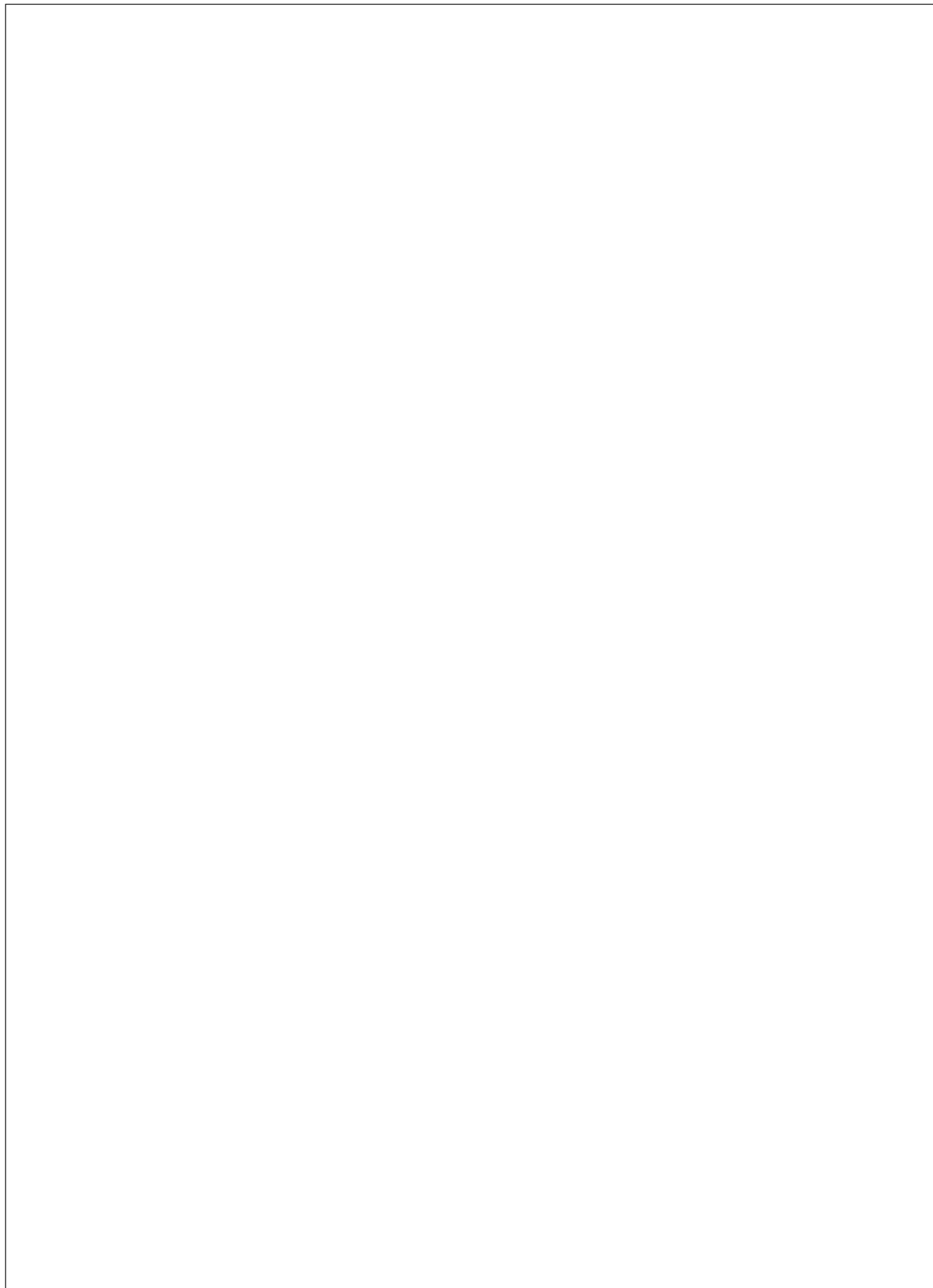




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Feature

Allan Mazur

Volume 31.2, March / April 2007

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*The ongoing debate between scientists and creationists has ignored the contradictions contained in Genesis.*

Proponents of intelligent design (ID) and evolution each try to undermine the other's position. Strangely absent from the contemporary debate is any critique of the Bible itself. ID is, after all, simply a "nonreligious" framing of divine creation as expressed in Genesis. Who else but God would the intelligent designer be?

The opening pages of Genesis actually contain two different and inconsistent versions of creation. One tells the events of seven days; the other is a tale about Adam and Eve.

### Seven Days

Here is the story as found in Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 of *The Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Edition.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters which were under the dome from the waters which were above the dome. And it was so. And God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation; plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he

**Allan Mazur**

*Inquirer, appeared on The Rachel Maddow Show...*

created them; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.

Aspects of the story may seem peculiar. Evenings and mornings alternate for three days before there is a sun, and for the same reason plants and fruit trees initially grow without photosynthesis. The dome of the sky has water above it (different from clouds within it) as well as below. Perhaps to the ancient mind an invisible sea above the sky was the source of rainfall.

Bible scholars note the affinity of the opening passage of Genesis to *Enuma Elish*, a Mesopotamian creation myth dated to about 1100 b.c. (Freedman 1992, 526–528). This poem, written in cuneiform on seven tablets and named for its first words, was discovered in the ruins of the library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh. The story, now known in different renditions, opens when there is no heaven or earth. Only the male god Apsu (fresh water) and the female god Tiamat (sea water) exist. Their mingling of waters produces other gods and silt in the waters. Then a horizon separates clouds from silt, forming heaven and earth. Much of the narrative is concerned with discord and battle among the gods from which Marduk emerges as dominant. Along the way, celestial lights are placed in heaven, and Tiamat produces fearful animals to aid her struggle against other gods. Marduk heaps up mountains and opens springs to create the Tigris and Euphrates. He creates temples and the city of Babylon, and then makes man. The work of creation is finished within the first six tablets. The seventh tablet exalts the creation and greatness of Marduk's work.

### **Adam and Eve**

The second creation story in Genesis (2:4–2:25), concerning Adam and Eve, immediately follows the account of seven days:

In the day that Yahweh made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for Yahweh had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise up from the earth and water the whole face of the ground—then Yahweh formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. And Yahweh planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground Yahweh made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Yahweh took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And Yahweh commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Then Yahweh said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." So out of the ground Yahweh formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them; and whatever Adam called every living creature, that was its name. Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for Adam there was not found a helper as his partner. So Yahweh caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that Yahweh had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then Adam said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

As in *Enuma Elish*, the Tigris and Euphrates place us in the Middle East. The rivers are said to branch from an outflow of the Garden of Eden. Since the headwaters of these two great rivers are in Turkey, that nation is the closest we can come to locating the biblical origin of humankind. Anomalously, the Mormons, following a revelation to founder Joseph Smith, locate the Garden of Eden in western Missouri (Brodie 1971).

We read of Eden as being "in the East," indicating the author's own location as west of the Tigris and Euphrates, plausibly in or near ancient Israel. We have no modern identification of the Pishon and Gihon Rivers, said to branch from the same source as the Tigris and Euphrates. These names may be fictitious, reflecting the "western" author's imperfect knowledge of Mesopotamia, or they may have been real rivers now lost through geological change.

Small details of text have come to have deep cultural meaning. Forming Adam "from the dust of the ground" evokes each person's life course: "ashes to ashes, dust to dust." Forming Eve from Adam's rib suggests to some readers that women are (or should be) subordinate to men.

Of Genesis's two accounts of creation, I prefer the story of Adam and Eve. It has characters with whom to empathize, and we can follow the family saga through subsequent passages. It has puzzles to ponder. Why did God so misunderstand his creation Adam as to offer an animal or bird as a suitable partner? Eve's creation seems to be a second attempt at partnering, after it became clear to Yahweh that no animal or bird would do. If the first attempt had worked, would there have been a Cain or Abel? Why was Eve made from one of Adam's bones instead of his hair or muscle or blood? Perhaps the reason is that skeletons are the most enduring remains of a body, and ribs are among the few redundant bones that, if taken away, would not leave Adam crippled, but a tooth might have done as well. One can speculate endlessly. There is no way to reach a correct answer except by faith or fiat.

Some traditionalists see the Bible's two stories of creation as a telescopic narrative, with the opening account giving the "big picture" while the story of Eden narrows the focus. Adam and Eve's tale is so engagingly different from the impersonal catalog of seven days that casual readers may not notice their contradictions. In the seven days story, all vegetation including seed plants and fruit trees is made on the fourth day. All sea creatures and flying birds are made on the fifth day. All land animals from cattle to creeping things are made on the sixth day, and afterward God makes humans—male and female—to rule over these fish, birds, and animals, and to use the plants for food.

In the second story, Adam comes first "when no plant of the field was yet on the earth." Then plants are created in Eden. Then "out of the ground Yahweh formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air." Finally Eve is made from Adam's rib.

Early readers within both Hellenistic and rabbinic Judaism recognized these inconsistencies and considered how they might be reconciled. Some assumed the first-created human—"male and female"—was an androgyne, later split into Adam and Eve. The Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo thought the primal androgyne was without a body, and that humans with bodies described in Genesis 2 represented a separate act of creation (Boyarin 1993: 17, 38). [1]

Was the first man created before plants and animals and birds, or afterward? Did birds appear before land animals or at the same time? The sequences agree on only two points: (1) vegetation preceded animals and birds, and (2) the first woman was created at the end of the process. There is little correspondence between either of the biblical sequences and our modern understanding of life's history. Water animals such as trilobites are the earliest known fossils of complex organisms, appearing long before land plants. Plant and animal life was abundant on land before many kinds of fish appeared; and marine mammals including whales are quite recent. Land plants did precede land animals that fed on them, but seed plants and fruit trees (angiosperms) appeared after dinosaurs and small mammals had long roamed the earth. Birds followed dinosaurs. Humans—of both sexes—are the newest of the major kinds mentioned in Genesis (Fortey 1998).

### Multiple Authorship

Literary scholars of the nineteenth century developed methods of text analysis focused on such questions as whether a single author did indeed write all of the works attributed to Shakespeare. Their method, very briefly, is to compare themes and writing styles of the different works, on the assumption that particular authors may be recognized by their unique and consistent forms of expression, grammar, choice of words, and punctuation. In

Germany, scholars applied the same method to the Bible, not to undermine belief but to gain a better understanding of this holy text.

As illustration, compare the two versions of creation. We have already seen that they contradict one another in sequencing the appearance of life forms on earth. They also differ in overall style, one a log of seven days, perhaps derived from *Enuma Elish*, the other a tale that a bard might tell about specific people, Adam and Eve. There is in addition an important difference in referring to the deity. The seven days version speaks impersonally of "God" (in Hebrew *Elohim*). In the Adam and Eve tale, God is called by his personal name, Yahweh. In the seven days account, the words used for creation are derivatives of one Hebrew root; in the Adam and Eve account they are derived from a different root (Rofé 1999). There is a strong case that the two passages were written by different authors.

After nearly two centuries of research, most nonfundamentalist biblical scholars agree that Genesis is a composite, a merger of previously separate documents. The Adam and Eve tale that speaks of Yahweh is the opening portion of what is called the "Yahwist" or J document (for *Jahwist*, as German scholars spell it). The "seven days" version of creation begins what is called the "Priestly" or P document, because of its exceptional interest in priestly issues. Though each document may be consistent in itself, when juxtaposed they produce inconsistencies or explicit contradictions.

One need not accept the hypothesis of multiple authors to see the logical inconsistencies and physical absurdities in Genesis. We can at least say in favor of intelligent design that it is free of these particular problems. Perhaps we owe its formulators some thanks for moving us away from a 6,000-year-old earth, Adam and Eve, and the story of a few men who in months built with simple tools a boat sufficiently large to house and feed representatives of every species of animal that ever existed.

### Note

1. See [here](#) for examples of modern commentary that explain away inconsistencies between Genesis 1 and 2 by introducing novel English-to-Hebrew translations, ad hoc interpretation of words or phrases, or ignoring details in the text.

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