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Jewish Understandings of Genesis 1 to 3

This article examines the understandings of the creation accounts in Genesis 1–3 found in various early Jewish writings including rabbinical, philosophical and mystical/apocalyptic works. In general, Jewish writers distinguished various levels of meaning, including an allegorical as well as a literal or historical level. At the historical level of interpretation, however, certain aspects of the narrative were taken as symbolic or metaphorical, and a purely 'literalistic' understanding was not deemed natural to the language. The relevance of this historical material is discussed in the context of contemporary conservative approaches to interpreting the creation passages.

Keywords: Creation, Genesis, Jewish, Allegorical, Literalistic, Rabbinic.

Introduction

The Jewish tradition is very rich in its diversity of understandings of creation. Both the Jewish New Testament writers and the early Christian Fathers were affected by extra-biblical Jewish writings and traditions in their understanding of creation and the part Jesus played in it, and nowhere is this more evident than in the opening to St John's Gospel. The Targums were translations of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Aramaic which 'before the Christian era... had in good part replaced Hebrew in Palestine as the vernacular of the Jews.'¹ The Aramaic term Memra (word) was used in the Targums to mean God's name for Himself expounded in terms of his past and future presence in Creation and Redemption.² To say 'the word became flesh and tabernacled amongst us' is an obvious allusion to God's special presence in the Jewish tabernacle. The other Gospels and Paul's writings also show both doctrinal and linguistic links to the Targums.³ Current New Testament Studies, in particular the work of N T Wright, emphasize the importance of reading New Testament apocalyptic language (the sun and the moon being darkened etc) 'not as a kind of primitive weather forecast' for this was not how contemporary literature (eg that found in the Dead Sea materials) used such language.⁴ Both Wright's popular and weightier works emphasize the Jewish

1 *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis* Bernard Grossfield (1988) p. vii.

2 *Divine Name and Presence* C T R Hayward (1981) pp. 147ff. See also *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis* Bernard Grossfield (1988) pp. 25 ff.

3 See eg *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* Martin McNamara (1978).

4 *The Original Jesus* N.T Wright (1996) p. 116.

culture of Jesus and Paul.⁵ As we shall see, Philo and other later Jewish writings also influenced later Christian commentators.

All classification systems have limitations, but the Hebrew writers on Genesis 1 to 3 can be classified into three non-definitive groups, distinctions between which are not always clearcut:

- ‘Philosophical’ such as the work of Philo and Maimonides.
- ‘Exegetical’ such as the Targums, and the Rabbinic commentaries.
- ‘Mystic/Apocalyptic’ such as the *Jubilees*, some writings of the Qumran community, and other work of the Pseudepigrapha.

The intention of this paper is to examine each of these three traditions in turn and to try to determine whether they took a ‘literalistic’ approach to the Hebrew Text. By ‘literalistic’ I mean that for example:

- Creation took place in six periods of twenty-four hours, with the sun, moon and stars being made on the fourth day.
- That the first woman Eve was made from the physical side of Adam.
- That Eve communicated with a talking snake.

It would, of course, be wrong to imagine that there were only two mutually exclusive ways of viewing Genesis: ‘literally’ and ‘allegorically’. Often Jewish (and Christian) writers accepted that there could be two (or more) levels of understanding for the same passage, ie interpretations at both a literal/historical and an allegorical level. ‘Allegorical’ in this context means to build a symbolic meaning onto a passage which the original author may not have intended and on an issue totally distinct from that of its primary historical meaning. Paul seems to do this in discussing Abraham,⁶ and in fact uses the Greek word ἀλληγορούμενα – which means ‘being allegorised’. He was not, of course, denying that there really was an individual Abraham on the literal/historical level of interpretation. Importantly, however, many ancient commentators also take parts of their ‘literal’ historical level of interpretation to be using symbolic or metaphorical language. Thus, eg, Philo takes the story of God making Eve from Adam’s ‘side’ to be metaphorical – to take it ‘literally’ would, he says, be absurd even as part of the literal or historical level of interpretation. To say, however, that a feature of the narrative is symbolic does not undermine its historicity in the eyes of the early commentators, and does not mean that other features of the same passage cannot be taken as literally historical.

One other very different foundational point worth making is that the Hebrew alphabet consists purely of consonants with the vowel system being added much later by the Masoretes. This means that there may be (and sometimes are) different ways of vocalising the Hebrew text.

5 *What Saint Paul Really Said* N.T Wright (1997), also *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996) and *The New Testament and the People of God* (1992). His presentation in the latter (pp. 262ff.) of the 1st century Jewish view of Israel as the ‘true Adam’ is also relevant to comprehending their understanding of the language.

6 Galatians 4:24

This paper does not intend to argue that there are discernible ‘correct’ interpretations based on the Hebrew language; nor does it suggest supporting all the particular symbolic or figurative understandings various commentators took. What it seeks to show is how far different writers introduced symbolic or metaphorical understandings into their interpretations of the text at the ‘literal’ or historical level of meaning.

Before examining the Hebrew text, it should be remembered that the study of the Old Testament has seen a quiet revolution in this century. This is partly due to the recent dates of important critical editions of Old Testament interpretations⁷:

- *Masoretic Text* (MT) 1969⁸
- *Samaritan Pentateuch* (Cam Pent) 1914⁹
- Greek – *Septuagint* (LXX) 1974¹⁰
- Latin – *Vulgate* (Vg) 1969¹¹
- Syriac – *Peshitta* (S) 1977¹²
- Aramaic *Targum Onkelos* (TO) 1959¹³
- Aramaic *Targum Neofiti I* (TN) 1968¹⁴
- Aramaic *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (PJ) 1984¹⁵

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls also helped in this process of change, because some of the documents found show parts of the Hebrew text as it was before Jesus. These were very similar to the MT, but also contained texts which may have been similar to those behind the Septuagint translation (LXX). This has led to a perception that works like the Targums were written when a text not much different from the Masoretic text was available, so the Targums are now seen less as a basis for textual criticism of the Masoretic Text, and more as interesting interpretations or even *commentaries* on it.

Philosophical Writings

Many of the ancient Jewish writers, however, do not just comment on the text but read great amounts into it. This is certainly the case with Philo in his works *On the Account of the World's Creation Given by Moses and Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis II, III*.¹⁶ Philo was an Alexandrian Jew who lived from around 15–10 BC to AD 45–50. He was, therefore, a contemporary of Jesus and Paul, though

7 *Word Biblical Commentary Gen. 1-15* Gordon Wenham (1987) p. xxiii. A newer edition of the MT is now in preparation.

8 *Liber Genesis: Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* O Eissfeldt (1969). This was not, of course, the first critical edition of the MT, such editions go back to the 1930's and before.

9 *Der Hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner* A F von Gall (1914).

10 *Genesis Septuaginta* J W Wevers (1974).

11 *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* I R Weber (1969).

12 *The OT in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version I: Genesis* P A H de Boer (1977).

13 *A Bible in Aramaic I: The Pentateuch According to Targum Onkelos* A Sperber (1959).

14 *Neofiti I: Targum Palestinense MS de la Biblioteca Vaticana I Genesis* A Diez Macho (1968).

15 *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch* E G Clarke (1984).

16 *Philo Volume 1* Translated by F H Colson and G H Whitaker (1991).

there is no reason to believe he ever encountered either of them or read Paul's writings. It is also evident from some of his quotations that he was using the LXX Pentateuch (which originated in Alexandria around the 3rd Century BC) the translation of which was regarded as inspired. Jaki suggests, however, that as 'the scion of a priestly family' Philo was 'of course, brought up on the Hebrew Scriptures', and used Greek because in his community 'the use of Greek was more common than the use of Hebrew.'¹⁷ Some modern Jewish writers emphasize that along with his philosophy Philo was 'emphatic about the importance of Jewish law' and thought the prescriptions of the written law should not be set aside as purely symbolic.¹⁸ One recent study states:

In the main Philo takes seriously the historicity of the biblical narrative... What was needed was balance – careful attention to both. On occasion Philo even declares his admiration for the literal narrative... But Philo's admiration for the literal interpretation has its limits. In a number of texts he expresses the view that the literal interpretation is for those who are unable to see an underlying deeper meaning...¹⁹

Philo's works can perhaps be best understood as a fusion of Hellenism (particularly Platonic thinking) and committed Judaism, and this is reflected in his many writings. Two of Philo's most memorable features in his work are his tendency to digress and his verbose descriptions of, for example, the properties of numbers. Another important characteristic of Philo which is endemic throughout his writings is his praise (and some would say almost adulation) of Moses. He assumes Moses wrote Genesis and asserts:

He says that in six days the world was created, not that its Maker required a length of time for His work, for we must think of God as doing all things simultaneously, remembering that "all" includes with the commands which He issues the thought behind them. Six days are mentioned because for the things coming into existence there was a need of order... For it was requisite that the world, being most perfect of all things that have come into existence, should be constituted in accordance with a perfect number, namely six.²⁰

This text provides a good indication of Philo's exegetical stance. The "days" are symbolic not literal, and Philo does not even believe the passage was intended to give the order of events. Whilst holding the Torah with the utmost regard as being divinely inspired in its author Moses, he believes that the true purpose of the passage is to convey metaphysical truths to the mind of the reader. Philo stresses the use of "one day" rather than "first day" in the context of the beginning of creation²¹, and gives voice to the Platonic idea of God first creating the ideas of things in totality before bringing them into reality:

17 *Genesis 1 Through the Ages* Stanley L Jaki (1998).

18 *Fifty Key Jewish Thinkers* Rabbi Professor Dan Cohn-Sherbok (1997) p. 105.

19 'Philo and the Fathers' Fearghus O Fearghail in *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers* Thomas Finan & Vincent Twomey (1995) pp. 46–7; see also *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* R N Longenecker (1975 repr 1995) Ch 1.

20 *On the Creation* Philo 13–14.

21 *Ibid.*, 15.

So when He willed to create this visible world He first fully formed the intelligible world, in order that He might have the use of a pattern wholly God-like and incorporeal in producing the material world, as a later creation, the very image of the earlier, to embrace in itself objects of perception of as many kinds as the other contained objects of intelligence.

Many of Philo's writings resonate with ideas in modern science, and contain ideas found in later Christian commentators eg Augustine (Philo's use and interpretation of λόγος as the "Word of God" commended itself to the early Christian scholars trying to identify with the Jewish tradition). Many of the earlier Rabbis believed that time started at the point of creation (see below), but Philo also thought that time was a property of space:

Time began either simultaneously with the world or after it. For since time is a measured space determined by the world's movement, and since movement could not be prior to the object moving, but must of necessity arise either after it or simultaneously with it, it follows of necessity that time also is either coeval with or later born than the world.²²

It is difficult to tell whether Philo thought of this himself or whether he took it from the Hellenistic science he was exposed to in Alexandria. It is unlikely he took it from a Jewish source as this view is not apparent in *Genesis Rabbah* or the other Jewish Rabbinic writings.

In commenting on each of the days of creation, Philo usually first sets out what was created on that day, and then (as in the case of the description of the fourth day) repeats the point that the order does not necessarily even signify importance.²³ For Philo, the day numbers have symbolic meaning, eg in the context of the fourth day:

But the heaven was afterwards duly decked in a perfect number, namely four. This number it would be no error to call the base and source of 10, the complete number; for what 10 is actually, this, as is evident, 4 is potentially...²⁴

Each time Philo describes at length all the properties of that number, and how suited the number is for whatever was created on that day. This may seem rather strange to modern readers, but in the heyday of the Pythagoreans and other Greek philosophers who had a major affect on Philo, it becomes apparent that Philo viewed this as secular learning or in a sense 'science'. He was viewing the Genesis story through the spectacles of this Greek metaphysical ideology – understanding parts of the language of Genesis 1 to 3 as symbolic to reflect his contemporary 'science' in a Jewish perspective. Another example of Philo's almost prophetic exegesis comes later in the work:

At that time, indeed, all things took shape simultaneously. But, though all

²² *Ibid.*, 26.

²³ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

things took shape together, the fact that living organisms were afterwards to come into existence one out of another rendered necessary an adumbration of the principle of order in the narrative.²⁵

It is difficult to ascertain how far Philo actually takes this idea, though the concept is prescient. Philo goes on to discuss seeds as being the original starting-point of living creatures, including man, and then concludes: "Now we find that this selfsame thing has occurred in the case of the creation of the universe also." Philo did not obtain this idea from the original text of the LXX but added it either from his own imagination or from some other philosophical source.

Philo is adamant (as are the authors of Targums and other Rabbinic documents) that God has no bodily form. This is underlined in his comments on man being made in God's image, in which Philo emphasises a non-physical interpretation of the concept, for:

Let no one represent the likeness as one to a bodily form; for neither is God in human form, nor is the human body God-like. No, it is in respect of the Mind, the sovereign element of the soul, that the word "image" is used; for after the pattern of a single Mind, even the Mind of the Universe as an archetype, the mind of each of those who successively came into being was moulded.²⁶

Philo summarises the points he wants to communicate through his interpretation of Genesis as follows:²⁷

1. God is and has been from eternity.
2. God is one.
3. The world came into being.
4. The world too is one as well as its Maker.
5. God also exercises forethought on the world's behalf.

Philo describes the trees in the Garden of Eden as being:

...intended symbolically rather than literally; for never yet have trees of life or of understanding appeared on the earth, nor is it likely that they will appear hereafter.²⁸

In fact his whole concept of Adam and Eve is very figurative. He does not see this as being 'mythical' or denigrating the Scriptures as he writes:

Now these are no mythical fictions, such as poets and sophists delight in, but modes of making ideas visible, bidding us resort to allegorical interpretation guided in our renderings by what lies beneath the surface.²⁹

25 *Ibid.*, 67.

26 *Ibid.*, 69; see also *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* R N Longenecker (1975) Ch 1.

27 *On the Creation* Philo 170–171.

28 *Ibid.*, 154.

29 *Ibid.*, 157.

Philo's work *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis II, III* is even longer than the first, and only very brief comments will be made here. Once again in this work Philo does not take the story of the creation of Eve literally, remarking that, "These words in their literal sense are of the nature of a myth."³⁰ In this case *as well as* building a separate allegorical meaning onto the text, Philo *also* takes a symbolic approach to the 'literal' meaning, ie he does not believe it to be intended at *any* level as a scientific description of the creative process:

And what was there to hinder the First Cause from creating woman, as He created man, out of the earth?... And why, when there were so many parts to choose from, did He form the woman not from some other part but from the side? And which side did he take? ... Did he take the left or the right side?... Truly our sides are twin in all their parts and are made of flesh. What then are we to say ? "Sides" is a term of ordinary life for "strength." ... Having said this, we must go on to remark that the mind when as yet unclothed and unconfined by the body (and it is of the mind when not so confined that he is speaking) has many powers.³¹

But then Philo does not take Adam altogether literally either – and he distinguishes between the heavenly man and the earthly man:

...two men are introduced to the garden, the one a moulded being, the other "after the image".³²

As for the rivers in the garden these are also interpreted figuratively in a very long passage where Philo expounds on each name.³³ On the allegorical level the wild beasts represent passions³⁴ and the snake pleasure.³⁵ On the creation of Eve (in addition to that above) Philo then has:

God leads active perception [Eve] to the mind [Adam], knowing that its movement and apprehensive power must revert to the mind as their starting-point.³⁶

The allegorical imagery employed here is shaped to fit Philo's model of the creation of the mind. Comparing this to Plato's famous work *The Republic*, the similarities are obvious. Much of *The Republic* is concerned with the interaction of the mind and the body, and drawing analogy to society. Philo appears to be reading Platonic philosophy into the Genesis narrative, thereby constructing another level of meaning whilst still accepting the literal/historical one (as many of the Rabbis did with such passages). The key point here, however, is that Philo insists that there is significant figurative use of language on this literal/historical level of interpretation.

30 *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis Book II* Philo 19.

31 *Ibid.*, 19–22.

32 *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis Book I* Philo 53.

33 *Ibid.*, 63–87.

34 *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis Book II* Philo 11.

35 *Ibid.*, 71.

36 *Ibid.*, 40.

Rabbinic Writings

The next school of understanding is also based around a commentary in the form of the Rabbinic writings. An important concept in the mind of the Rabbis was that the law given to Moses contains everything, and in fact the “law” itself is derived from the Hebrew word תּוֹרָה ie *tôrâ* (or *Torah*). Also Jesus ben Sira in his *Ecclesiasticus* (c.190 BC) identifies wisdom with the law, and uses the Eden model of the four rivers to describe the knowledge of the law flowing from God through the Jews to renew the spiritual life of the world.³⁷

The Biblical link to wisdom is most apparent in Proverbs 8. This was known as Scripture to ben Sira, and is likely to have reached its final form well before his time:

Does not wisdom call? And understanding gives her voice... I, wisdom, dwell with sense, and search out knowledge of wise actions... The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, from then, before His works. I was set up from everlasting; from the beginning, before the earth ever was...

The Rabbis draw on this passage greatly in their exposition of Genesis and the creation. Many were disinterested in the literal meaning, but the text was important as it: “was utilized as a means of combating heretical views on the dual nature of the God-head.” Genesis Rabbah is part of the Midrashic literature which provides a collection of Rabbinic thought from the earliest Soferim many years before Christ through to its (fairly) final form in the 6th Century AD.³⁸ According to *Genesis Rabbah*, not only wisdom but the Throne of Glory also existed before the rest of creation,³⁹ and both Rav Judah and Rav Nehemiah asserted that the primordial light preceded the creation of the world. In fact many of the Rabbis talk of things created before the world, and the main view appears to be that “six things preceded the creation of the world; some of them were actually created, while the creation of others was already contemplated.”⁴⁰

The Rabbis would often become engrossed with what might appear side issues, for example on why the world was created with a בּ Beth (the first letter in Genesis).⁴¹ On this subject the Rabbis list and expound four possible views in terms of:

1. The form of the בּ Beth ie its shape.
2. The creation of two worlds.
3. The indication of blessing.
4. The directions in which the points of the letter project.

37 *Ecclesiasticus* Jesus ben Sira 24:23–29.

38 *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* John Bowker (1969) p. 40 usefully summarises the various rabbinic terms like *halakah*, *haggadah* etc.

39 *Judaism and the Doctrine of Creation* N M Samuelson (1994) p. 114.

40 *Genesis Rabbah* I 4.

41 *Ibid.*, I 10.

The use of בּ beth also created a diversity of writings in the mystical/apocalyptic literature which will be discussed later.

The long exegesis of בּ beth is characteristic of the Jewish love of word play. The best known examples of the similarities between relevant words are that אָדָם (transliterated as 'ādām or *Adam*) mankind came from אֶרֶץ (‘āḏāmā) earth, and אִשָּׁה ('iššā or *Issah*) the woman came from אִישׁ ('iš or *Ish*) the man.⁴² The Jewish historian Josephus (c AD 37–100) also describes the Hebrew word play on the word חַוְוָה (*ḥawwā* or 'Eve') as follows:

Now a woman is called in the Hebrew tongue 'Issa;' but the name of this woman was Eve, which signifies 'the mother of all living'.⁴³

The Hebrew word for living here is simply חַי, and in fact some of the Jewish mystics seem to take this word as being purely a word play and not necessarily a proper name. Another source for this view is the Septuagint (LXX), which was translated around the 3rd Century BC in Alexandria for the Jews who were using Greek as the common language. It translates the naming of Eve as follows:

And Adam called the name of his wife Life, because she was the mother of all living.⁴⁴

It is interesting that the LXX translates the word חַוְוָה as Ζωή, ie 'Zoe' which is not an attempt to convert the Hebrew letters directly into Greek letters which one would expect if the translators had considered חַוְוָה to be a proper name. In Genesis 4:1, however, the LXX renders אִשָּׁה חַוְוָה as Ἐύα, perhaps regarding this as a name.

Josephus uses a different word play for the creation of man, saying "concerning the formation of man" that Moses was speaking "philosophically", and also draws on a separate word play for:

Adam, which in the Hebrew tongue signifies one that is red, because he was formed out of red earth, compounded together; for of that kind is virgin and true earth.⁴⁵

However, much more can be read into the text than this, given a knowledge of the Hebrew. In Exodus 3:14, the writer recounts how God met Moses in the burning bush experience, and when Moses asks for his name God says:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיּוֹם אֶל־מִשֶּׁה אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנֵי אֵלֵיכֶם:

This is traditionally translated as:

42 See also eg *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* Ed W A VanGemeren (1996) vol 1 p. 264 and vol 4 p. 360 etc.

43 *Antiquities of the Jews Book 1* Josephus Chapter 2.

44 *The Septuagint* Genesis 3:21. The Greek word we translate 'wife' is, of course, the same word as for 'woman'.

45 *Antiquities of the Jews Book 1* Josephus Chapter 2.

And God said to Moses ‘I AM who I AM’ and he said ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel: I AM has sent me to you’.

Many commentators note a word play between this passage and Genesis 1. *Targum Neofiti* (which is discussed in detail later) interprets this passage as:

The one who said and the world came into existence from the beginning; and is to say to it again: Be, and it will be, has sent me to you.⁴⁶

The appearances of the Hebrew word אֲנִי־אֵלֹהִים which can be translated as I AM denotes three different concepts, as it appears three times in the verse and it is a general Rabbinic principle that no word is redundant, and so the term is often related to past, present and future. This concept is echoed in Revelation (the one who was and is and is to come), it is initiated in Genesis 1 by inference to the Hebrew word הָיָה as used for “let there be...” and all the letters for this word are part of the divine name – יהוה. This word יהוה is in the third person in Genesis 1 but in the first person when speaking to Moses, and many Rabbis understand this as a new creational name personal to God revealed for the first time to Moses. Isaiah sees this as the second creation of Israel and thus mirrors the creation story in his ‘prophetic commentary’ using the word הָיָה (and intra-Biblical commentary on Genesis is quite common⁴⁷). Dr C T R Hayward has written on this subject.⁴⁸

Another great Rabbinic principle is based on the word of God (reflected in the Targumatic use of Memra) – that “the world was created in ten sayings”⁴⁹, as the Hebrew phrase וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים “And God said” appears ten times in Genesis 1. This figure of ten resurfaces later in the rabbinical commentaries, where ten things were created before the first Sabbath. Hayward in his recent study of the divine name states:

Memra is God’s ‘HYH. His name for Himself expounded in terms of His past and future presence in Creation and Redemption.⁵⁰

According to the Targums the world is said to have been created by mercy, which Hayward points out is the same as saying it was created by the Memra, thus illuminating the Rabbinic dictum that the world was created by ten *ma^amarôt* (*ma^amar* being the Hebrew equivalent of Memra or word).

There is an indication of Hellenistic science being reflected in the way that the Scriptures were interpreted. In *Genesis Rabbah* II 2–4 there is a description of the use of fire, water, air and earth as being the principle elements of creation. Also God is not thought to have created just one world, but many – God kept creating more until he was happy with the outcome in a ‘trial and error’ type approach.⁵¹ Day one is, according to *Genesis Rabbah*, when the first differentiation of space

46 *Targum Neofiti I to Exodus* 3:14.

47 *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis* Bernard Grossfield (1988) p. 3.

48 *Divine Name and Presence: The Memra* C T R Hayward (1981).

49 *Ethics of the Fathers* V.

50 *Divine Name and Presence: The Memra* C T R Hayward (1981) p. 147.

51 *Genesis Rabbah* III 7.

and sphere took place. As well as the creation of the light and wind of God on Day one, 996,000 alternative universes were supposedly created. Day three is the supposed time of creation for Eden,⁵² and according to Samuelson's reading of *Genesis Rabbah*, it was distinct from Paradise, and was created with 310 worlds.

The *Midrash* deals with the idea of taking the days literally by analogy to a wedding feast, and indeed many, though not all, of the Rabbis were of the view that God created everything instantaneously rather than in any period of time.⁵³ Samuelson also resolutely declares:

... the sages agree that the creation of this earth and sky was a single divine event and not a series of distinct occurrences spread out over six or seven days.⁵⁴

On the creation of man, many of the Rabbis have Adam originally created as a hermaphrodite that was later separated into male and female, but again this is not the only view. Whilst at some times the רוּחַ (interpreted as the Spirit of God in most Christian texts) is translated 'wind' in the context of the four elements of creation, it is also understood by Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish to be speaking of the soul of Adam.⁵⁵ In the same passage we read this comment in the context of the soul:

In addition Rabbi Leazor said: 'He created him as a lifeless mass extending from one end of the world to the other; thus it is written, Thine eyes did see mine unformed substance (Ps cxxxix 16)'.

Another teacher named Judah ben Rabbi thought that when the Hebrew says, "and man became a living soul" it means that God gave him a tail but then removed it for dignity.⁵⁶

The common descent of mankind is drawn out by the sages in *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 4:5 observing that mankind was created as a single unit. They go on to say that God, to promote social harmony, intended that no person could have claim to a unique ancestry and thereby assert superiority over others. On Genesis 2, Rabbi Joshua of Siknin is recorded as saying in the name of Rabbi Levi, that God created woman from the side to be equal. The Rabbi then describes the unsuitability of any other area of the body, and makes reference to the failings of women in the Old Testament text.⁵⁷ The verse about "becoming one in flesh" is reflected in Rabbinic thinking. Celibacy is seen as undesirable, eg in *Genesis Rabbah*:

52 *Ibid.*, XV 3.

53 *Ibid.*, III 6.

54 *Judaism and the Doctrine of Creation* N M Samuelson (1994) p. 115.

55 *Genesis Rabbah* VIII 1.

56 *Ibid.*, XIV 10.

57 *Ibid.*, XVIII 2.

Whoever has no wife exists without goodness, without a helpmate, without joy, without blessing, without atonement... without well being, without a full life;... such a one reduces the representation of the divine image [on earth].⁵⁸

Another Jewish 'exegetical' source which 'usually faithfully reflects rabbinic exegesis'⁵⁹ is that of the Targums. *Britannica CD 98* explains:

In the course of the 5th and 6th centuries BCE, Aramaic became the official language of the Persian Empire. In the succeeding centuries it was used as the vernacular over a wide area and was increasingly spoken by the postexilic Jewish communities of Palestine and elsewhere in the Diaspora. In response to liturgical needs, the institution of a turgeman (or meturgeman, "translator"), arose in the synagogues. These men translated the Torah and prophetic lectionaries into Aramaic. The rendering remained for long solely an oral, impromptu exercise, but gradually, by dint of repetition, certain verbal forms and phrases became fixed and eventually committed to writing.

C T R Hayward has confirmed in a personal communication that in his view the Targumic tradition was certainly current in the first century, most Jews would have known it through the Synagogue, and Jesus on the cross quotes the Aramaic version of Psalm 22:1. When the Hebrew Bible was read in the synagogue, a 'Targumist' would explain the passage in Aramaic – the common tongue – and this would be done a section at a time, similar to a modern interpreter.⁶⁰ The translations made were generally very faithful to the original, translating literally, but the Targumists seem not to have stopped there, but would add comment (sometimes in large quantities) into the text and change words for the aid of understanding:

...despite the reputation of TO for its literal rendering of the MT, there are thousands of deviations.⁶¹

Early Targumists would extemporise or recite their Targum from memory, ie without the aid of any scrolls, though as McNamara and others point out: 'From Qumran we have evidence that at least some written Targums existed in early times.'⁶² There is a great diversity of Targum literature,⁶³ but in this present paper the intention is to dwell on the three main versions we have today:

1. The *Targum Onqelos* (TO), which became the 'official' Jewish version and is likely to reflect the materials commonly used in the first century synagogues.
2. The *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (PJ), which seems to have been for scholarly work only as it says many controversial things.

58 *Ibid.*, 17:2.

59 *Britannica CD 98*: speaking specifically of Targum Onkelos (alternative spelling for Onqelos).

60 *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis* p. 2.

61 Moses Ababach & Bernard Grossfield *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis* (1982) p. 10. C T R Hayward says in a personal communication that some Targums are quite like commentaries, all interpret the Hebrew.

62 *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis* Martin McNamara (1992) p. 43.

63 *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* John Bowker (1969).

3. The *Targum Neofiti I* (TN), which is somewhere between the previous two.

As the Targums were developed to explain the Hebrew text, they evolved with time as the context the Jews found themselves in changed. Recent findings (especially those from the Qumran community) indicate that the Hebrew represented by the *Codex Leningradensis* (the oldest complete *Masoretic* version of the Bible, dating from the middle ages) is very similar to that of antiquity and Jesus' time. They have also, however, enabled a clearer view of the Targumic literature which points to a preservation of elements of the commentary from before Christ even though the Targums were edited into their final version a few centuries after Christ. There are principally two different Targumic lines, one from Babylon and one from Palestine.

It is a general feature of the Targums that they remove anthropomorphisms to God wherever possible, because obviously God does not have a hand or a face for example.⁶⁴ Often *Memra* will be substituted for divine presence.⁶⁵

The TO ended up as a Babylonian Targum, and whilst its final redaction is thought to have been made in the 3rd Century AD,⁶⁶ its roots are much older. Some scholars have voiced the view that the TO originated in Palestine (and take the similarity with the language of the Qumran Genesis Apocryphon to indicate this).⁶⁷ This Proto-Onkelos is thought to have existed in a reasonable form by the 2nd Century BC.⁶⁸ The position of the TO as the Targum of choice for the Hebrew Rabbis is indicated by the close relationship between TO and the Aggadic and Halakhic Midrashim, as well as the Talmuds.⁶⁹

Pseudo-Jonathan is a composite of the Old Palestinian Targum and an early version of Onkelos with an admixture of material from diverse periods. Dates for composition range from the time of Ezra,⁷⁰ to the time of the Crusades.⁷¹ Modern scholarship indicates that though there are certainly many pre-Christian ideas embodied within PJ,⁷² final redaction took place around the 9–10th Centuries.⁷³

Targum Neofiti I is the most commonly used example of a Targum in the true Palestinian tradition. The Codex of TN was catalogued as a version of the TO in the Vatican library before being realised as its own edition.⁷⁴ Whilst again having pre-Christian roots, the final collection of material is thought to have taken place in the 2nd or 3rd Century AD.⁷⁵

64 *The Targum Onkelos to Genesis* p. 19–21.

65 *Memra en los Targums del Pentateuco* D Munoz Leon (1974).

66 *The Targum Onkelos to Genesis* p. 8.

67 *Scripta Hierosolymitana* E Y Kutscher (1958) p.s 2 & 9.

68 *The Language of Targum Onkelos* Goshen-Gottstein p. 178.

69 *The Targum Onkelos to Genesis* pp. 15 & 32.

70 *Torah Shelemah* M M Kasher p.s 5 & 11.

71 *MS of PJD* Rieder p. 1.

72 *Introduction* Le Déaut (1966) p.s 92–96.

73 *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* D M Splansky (1981) p. 89.

74 *Christian News from Israel* A Diez Macho (1962).

75 *Targum Neofiti I to Genesis* p. 14.

How do the Targums interpret Genesis 1 to 3? TO has “In antiquity the Lord created ...”⁷⁶ and TN adds “From the beginning with wisdom the Memra of the Lord created...”⁷⁷ PJ explains that the light and darkness were created “so that the inhabitants of the world might labour in it.”⁷⁸ PJ adds a great deal about the sun and the moon:

God made the two great lights, and they were equal in glory for twenty-one hours less six hundred and seventy-two parts of an hour. After the moon spoke with a slanderous tongue against the sun, and it was made smaller. And he appointed the sun which was the greater light to rule over the day, and the moon which was the lesser light to rule over the night.⁷⁹

The creation of man is also embellished:

And God created Adam in his own likeness, in the image of God he created him, with two hundred and forty-eight members, with six hundred and sixty five nerves, and he formed a skin over him, and filled it with flesh and blood; male and female in their appearance he created them.⁸⁰

It has been suggested that these numbers are to draw parallels to the Torah which contains 248 commands and 665 prohibitions, and thus show that mankind, like the Torah, is inherently good.⁸¹

The garden of Eden is understood to have been created before the rest of the world in all major Targums. TO has it created “in ancient times”, whereas TN has “the Lord God had planted a garden in Eden from the beginning”,⁸² and PJ makes this belief clear:

Before the creation of the world a garden had been planted by the Memra of the Lord God from Eden for the righteous, and he made Adam dwell there when he created him.⁸³

It is interesting that TN actually has God putting, “the first Adam” into the garden – here treating the Hebrew word אָדָם to mean the first specimen of mankind.⁸⁴ PJ also expands this passage by giving:

The Lord God took Adam from the mountain of worship, the place whence he had been created, and made him dwell in the garden of Eden to labour in the law and to keep its commandments.⁸⁵

76 *Targum Onqelos to Genesis* 1:1.

77 *Targum Neofiti I to Genesis* 1:1.

78 *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis* Michael Maher (1992) 1:5–6.

79 *Ibid.*, 1:16.

80 *Ibid.*, 1:27.

81 *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis* n47.

82 *Targum Onqelos to Genesis* 2:8, *Targum Neofiti I to Genesis* 2:8.

83 *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis* 2:8.

84 *Targum Neofiti I to Genesis* 2:8. *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* Ed W A VanGemeren (1996) vol 1 p. 263 notes that Gen 4.25 is the first use of 'ādām without the definite article and as Hebrew proper names rarely if ever take the definite article more versions now see this as the first use of it as a name.

85 *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis* 2:15.

Yet PJ recounted the same movement of Adam in different words in 2:8. The writer is again reflecting a symbolic meaning, as any literal reading of PJ would make this statement inconsistent (and incompatible) with itself.

The tree of life according to PJ was made in the middle of the garden, “whose height was a journey of five hundred years”.⁸⁶ This view is not peculiar to PJ, as it is also reflected in the rabbinical writings.⁸⁷

In the final removal of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden, PJ and TN include the idea that the Law was created before the world. In PJ the insertion is quite small – “Before he had yet created the world, he created the Law.”⁸⁸ The TN insertion, however, is far longer and includes a great deal of theology brought to the passage, again indicating that Genesis 1 is not seen as a simple chronological account:

And he banished Adam; and he had made the Glory of his Shekinah dwell from the beginning to the east of the Garden of Eden, between the two cherubim. Two thousand years before he created the world he had created the Law; he had prepared the garden of Eden for the just and Gehenna for the wicked. He had prepared the garden of Eden for the just that they might eat and delight themselves from the fruits of the tree, because they had kept precepts of the Law in this world and fulfilled the commandments... For the Law is a tree of life for everyone who toils in it keeps the commandments: he lives and endures like the tree of life in the world to come. The Law is good for all who labour in it in this world like the fruit of the tree of life.⁸⁹

This provides a good example of the level of commentary and theology that would be read into a single verse. It must also be remembered that Jesus, the disciples and Paul would all have heard targumic translations and may well have listened to this type of exegesis in the synagogue as the Targumist would recount it after the Hebrew reading.⁹⁰

‘Mystical/Apocalyptic’ Writings

The third category of Jewish literature in issues relating to creation is more heterogeneous including writings which may be broadly described as mystical and/or apocalyptic. Often these ‘commentators’ would add vast quantities into the Hebrew narratives – much more than the Targums. It is quite difficult to find a starting place, as there are so many writings on the creation accounts and also on the life of Adam. The writings in the Pseudepigrapha are amongst the oldest and hence seem the most appropriate place to begin.

86 *Ibid.*, 2:9.

87 *Genesis Rabbah* 15,6; *J. Belak*. 1,2c and *Song Rabbah* 6,9.3.

88 *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis* 3:24.

89 *Targum Neofiti to Genesis* 3:24.

90 *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* Martin McNamara (1978) p. 41. *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* John Bowker (1969) p. 14. *The New Testament and the People of God* N T Wright (1992) p. 220

Jubilees is not really a 'mystical' work, but one of biblical exegesis with strong apocalyptic overtones. It was written around the 2nd Century BC,⁹¹ and sets the scene in its opening with Moses on Mount Sinai.⁹² This reflects the reluctance of the writer to accept that God could have been on the mountain for forty days with Moses without giving him much more detail than that recounted in Exodus. In the context of the garden of Eden, the *Nag Hammadi* texts are linked to *Jubilees* and locate paradise:

outside the circuit of the moon and the circuit of the sun in the luxuriant [truphé] earth.⁹³

The idea of "the place" מְקוֹם of the Lord is often identified across all Jewish traditions as being synonymous with God himself. *Jubilees* later identifies Eden as one of the Lord's four sacred places.⁹⁴ As to entering the garden of Eden, Adam entered on the fortieth day whereas Eve entered on the eightieth day.⁹⁵ According to Hayward:

In this way, *Jubilees* traces back to the first human couple the laws of Lev. 12:2–8, which require of a woman a period of forty days purification if she bear a son, eighty days if she bear a daughter, before she may enter the Temple.⁹⁶

In *Jubilees*, the sun is very important for marking the "appointed times of year" such as the sabbath and feasts etc,⁹⁷ and this is similar to that in the Genesis Apocryphon found in the Qumran community manuscripts.⁹⁸ There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and reference is often made to this number in commentary on Genesis. For example *Jubilees* states that at the end of creation "the total was twenty-two kinds."⁹⁹ Also "there were twenty-two chief men from Adam until Jacob, and twenty-two kinds of works were made before the seventh day."¹⁰⁰

There are a number of other Pseudepigraphical works which relate to Adam and the Genesis narrative. The book of 2 Baruch which dates from around AD 100 was probably translated (into Syriac) from Hebrew. It contains the following interesting passage:

For although Adam sinned first and has brought death upon all who were not in his own time, yet each of them who has been born from him has prepared for himself the coming torment. And further, each of them has chosen

91 O S Wintermute in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (1985) Vol 2 p. 43 (this is edited by James Charlesworth).

92 *Jubilees* 1.

93 CG2 110:3–5.

94 *Jubilees* 4:25–26.

95 *Ibid.*, 3:9.

96 *The Jewish Temple* C T R Hayward (1996) p. 89.

97 *Jubilees* 2:8–10.

98 *The Genesis Apocryphon* 4Q252.

99 *Jubilees* 2:15–16.

100 *Ibid.*, 2:23.

for himself the coming glory. For truly the one who believes will receive reward. But now, turn yourselves to destruction, you unrighteous ones who are living now, for you will be visited suddenly, since you have rejected the understanding of the Most High. For his works have not taught you, nor has the artful work of his creation which has always existed persuaded you. Adam is, therefore, not the cause, except only for himself, but each of us has become his own Adam.¹⁰¹

The parallels with the Pauline Romans here are intriguing. In Romans God may be known by what he has made (1:20), destruction is in store for those who have rejected God from their understanding (1:28), whilst reward is for those who believe (3:22). To Paul, we note, Adam has 'brought death on' those who followed (5:12). Surely the Pauline 'because all sinned' (5:12 and cf 7:9) is also reflected in the phrase 'each of us has become his own Adam'? What is, of course, missing, is the Pauline insistence that to believe is efficacious only because of the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah (a possible though disputed translation of 3:22).¹⁰² Much else, though, shows the parallels with Paul who was reinterpreting not abrogating Jewish approaches to the Biblical text.

Another interesting Pseudepigraphical work is that of *Pseudo-Philo* (nothing to do with Philo himself) which was written in the 1st Century AD.¹⁰³ In this version of the flood, the Holy Land was not touched by the flood at all,¹⁰⁴ which may suggest a symbolic interpretation even of the flood itself, which is quite late in the Genesis narrative (Chapter 6) ie close to the beginning of the patriarchal account (Chapter 12).

Jewish mysticism flourished in the post-Christian era, and Ginzberg has collected together many of the Jewish legends from the 2nd to the 14th Centuries AD, and compounded them into a highly referenced narrative.¹⁰⁵ Ginzberg has seven things created 2000 years before heaven and earth¹⁰⁶ and 974 generations before the creation of the world.¹⁰⁷ The PT account cited above of 'bickering' between the sun and moon is reflected in Ginzberg's material, along with an Aesop like story of 'the cat' and 'the mouse' in dispute and judged by God. But did they really believe in a talking sun and moon and animals – whether cat and mouse or a snake? Surely we must take it that writers in the Jewish 'mystic/ apocalyptic' tradition did not approach the Genesis text in this kind of literalistic way. Their poetical and analogical writing style reflect the assumption that the important point is the meaning behind the narratives. Just as the Aesop's Fables aim to communicate truth to the reader, so the cat and mouse or sun and moon stories aim to teach the sin of boasting, not biology or cosmology.

101 2 Baruch 54:15–19 tr A Kiljn in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 1 (1983).

102 *What Saint Paul Really Said* Tom (NT) Wright (1997) p.106; see also *God's Strategy in Human History* Roger Forster & Paul Marston (1989) Ch 19 n28 or (2000) pp. 121ff.

103 *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* DJ Harrington (1985) Vol 2 p. 298.

104 *Pseudo-Philo* 7:4.

105 *Legends of the Jews* Ginzberg (1909) Vol 1 XI.

106 *Ibid.*, Vol 1 p. 3.

107 BR 3.7 and 9.2; *Koheleth* 3.11; *Tehillim* 34,245.

Later Developments

To understand the development of some of the most widely revered Jewish rabbinic and philosophical thinking with respect to creation, the writings of three great Hebrew thinkers will be considered: Rashi, Maimonides and Gersonides.

Rashi (1040–1105) was a French Jew (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac) who stood squarely in the Rabbinic tradition. Rashi (like many others) used a four letter mnemonic to indicate the four principle ways in which the Bible can be understood.¹⁰⁸ This is actually the Hebrew word for ‘orchard’ based on four letters פֶּרֶדֶס PRDS:

1. Peshat is the plain obvious meaning.
2. Remez is the allusionary meaning.
3. Derush is the homiletic meaning.
4. Sod is the mystical meaning.

In discussing Rashi, Hailperin just assumes that:

...normative Judaism never demanded a uniform and binding belief as to the manner of creation, that is, as to the process whereby the universe came into existence.¹⁰⁹

Rashi did not take the Genesis creation passage to be trying to assert either a time-scale or even an order for creation:

The text does not intend to point the order of the [acts] of creation... the text does not by any means teach which things were created first and which later [it only] wants to teach us what was the condition of things at the time when heaven and earth were created, namely, that the earth was without form and a confused mass.¹¹⁰

It is interesting to see Rashi argue this point from the Hebrew language used. As one following the Rabbinic tradition and steeped in Hebrew semantics he must be considered an expert on such matters:

The text does not intend to point out the order of the acts of Creation – to state that these (heaven and earth) were created first; for if it intended to point this out, it should have written וְנוֹ בְרָא אֱתָ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנוֹ בְרָא אֶת הָאָרֶץ “At first God created etc.”... Should you, however, insist that it does actually intend to point out that these (heaven and earth) were created first, and that the meaning is, “At the beginning of everything He created these, *admitting therefore that the word בְּרֵאשִׁית is in its construct state and explaining the omission of a word signifying “everything” by saying that you have texts which are elliptical, omitting a word... you should be astonished at yourself, because as a matter of fact the waters were created before heaven and earth, for lo, it is written, (v. 2)*

108 *Rashi* Chaim Pearl (1988) ps 25–26.

109 *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* Herman Hailperin (1960) p. 43.

110 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

“The Spirit of God hovering on the face of the waters,” and Scripture had not yet disclosed when the creation of waters took place – consequently you must learn from this that the creation of the waters preceded *that of* the earth.¹¹¹

For a full treatment of Rashi’s views on Genesis see Rashi on the Pentateuch by John Henry Lowe (1928).

Maimonides (1135–1204) was a Spanish Jewish philosopher and exegete (Moses ben Maimon) who followed the teaching of Aristotle apart from where it disagreed with Scripture, as witnessed by the plethora of references to and quotes from Aristotle in Maimonides’ writings.¹¹² Maimonides is quite open about his position on the literality of Genesis 1 to 3. After an argument he states:

This remark is not superfluous, if the Scriptural account of the Creation be taken literally; in reality, it cannot be taken literally.¹¹³

Maimonides cites Hosea 12:10 as a justification for allegorical interpretations: “I have also spoken in similes by the prophets.” and quotes the sages in Yemen Midrash on Genesis 1:1:

It is impossible to give a full account of the Creation to man. Therefore Scripture tells us, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.¹¹⁴

After discussing the word play in the story of the creation of man and woman he says:

How great is the ignorance of those who do not see that all this necessarily includes some [other] idea [besides the literal meaning of the words]. This is now clear.¹¹⁵

In the context of the snake, Eve and the tree of life, Maimonides has:

The following is also a remarkable passage, most absurd in its literal sense; but as an allegory it contains wonderful wisdom, and fully agrees with the real facts, as will be found by those who understand all the chapters of this treatise.¹¹⁶

Maimonides believes that everything was created at once but was afterwards separated into its different forms.¹¹⁷ On the creation of the waters, he describes the action of “dividing them” as a distinction as regards their nature or form ie not with respect to space.¹¹⁸ The lack of a need to specify a spatial dimension is also present in Maimonides’ understanding of putting Adam into the garden:

111 *Commentary on Genesis* Rashi 1(1).

112 *The Medieval Jewish Mind* Chaim Pearl (1971) p. 38.

113 *The Guide to the Perplexed* Maimonides Creation – Eternity of the Universe XVII.

114 *The Guide to the Perplexed* Maimonides Introduction.

115 *The Guide to the Perplexed* Maimonides On Genesis 1–4 XXX.

116 *Ibid.*

117 *Ibid.*

118 *Ibid.*

The words, “He took him,” “He gave him,” have no reference to position in space, but they indicate his position in rank among transient beings, and the prominent character of his existence.¹¹⁹

Maimonides’ work also reflects the science of the day. A section of Maimonides’ book is devoted to the heavenly spheres,¹²⁰ which is based on the Greek astronomical theories of the day – not the Bible.

Gersonides (1288–1344) was a French Jewish philosopher (Levi ben Gershom) who was more critical of Aristotle and hence of Maimonides.¹²¹ Gersonides’ influence extended even into the nineteenth century. Staub writes:

A careful and sympathetic reading of Gersonides’ writings suggests that he did in fact believe that the truths of the Torah can be understood best as consistent with the language of medieval philosophy... He did not believe, therefore, that the obvious meaning of the text – the meaning that is apparent to anyone who opens Scripture – was its true meaning. An understanding of divine wisdom, in his view, required a lifetime of preparation and study and, even then, one’s grasp of the truths revealed in the Torah was very limited.¹²²

For Gersonides, the order in the Genesis account indicates the priority not the order of created things.¹²³ Gersonides also takes the ideas of the fire, air and water from contemporary science and reads them back into the Genesis account.¹²⁴ Furthermore he takes an allegorical interpretation of Adam as being the human soul.¹²⁵

It can therefore be asserted with assurance that the Jewish philosophical/exegetic tradition of allegorical interpretation of Genesis 1 to 3 did not decrease throughout the progression of Jewish thinking. The concept of taking much of Genesis 1 to 3 (eg the days) literally was alien to their interpretive framework.

Influence on Christian Thinking

Jewish thinking had a great effect on the thinking of some key Christian teachers. In Alexandria, home of Philo and the Therapeutae, the ‘Alexandrian’ school of thinking amongst the Fathers was renowned for its allegorical interpretations of Scripture. Clement of Alexandria (c155–220), mainstream scourge of Gnosticism, quotes Philo’s allegorical understanding of the Patriarchs.¹²⁶ Allan Menzies sees the roots of the Alexandrian allegorical method as being with Philo

119 *Ibid.*

120 *The Guide to the Perplexed* Maimonides *The Music of the Heavenly Spheres.*

121 *Fifty Key Jewish Thinkers* Dan Cohn-Sherbok (1997) p. 44.

122 *The Creation of the World According to Gersonides* Jacob J Staub (1982) p. 81.

123 *The Wars of the Lord* Gersonides 70.

124 *The Creation of the World According to Gersonides* Jacob J Staub (1982) p. 100.

125 *Ibid.*, p. 107.

126 Eg *The Stromata* of Clement, Bk I Sec V; see also Feargus O Fearghail “Philo and the Early fathers” in *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers* Thomas Finan & Vincent Twomey (1995) p. 53.

and Jewish sources.¹²⁷ Origen (c185–254), described in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as ‘the most important theologian and biblical scholar of the early Greek Church’ learned Hebrew, compiled the *Hexapla* showing the Hebrew Old Testament text in parallel with the LXX and other versions, and consulted rabbis on points of Hebrew language interpretation.¹²⁸ Origen was quite incredulous that anyone should take the ‘days’ in Genesis 1 as literal and chronological – the text itself seemed to him to indicate that the writer just had no such intention.¹²⁹

Jerome (c345–419) was at first a great admirer of Origen, though afterwards became much more critical.¹³⁰ Jerome’s work *Hebrew Questions on the Book of Genesis* owes more to the rival Antiochene school than to the Alexandrian.¹³¹ One view expressed in it is that God made paradise before heaven and earth, which Jerome connects to the ‘paradise in Eden’.¹³² In the Vulgate he puts *voluptas* for Eden. Jerome’s interpretation of ‘in the day in which you eat you shall die’ neither takes it as a day of 24 hours nor uses the equation of a day as 1000 years (as *Genesis Rabbah* 19:8 and the second century Justin *Dialogue* 81.2), but sees it in the more general sense that from that day death would confront them.¹³³ He did not, it seems, attempt to take a very literal approach to much of the Genesis narrative.

The Cappadocian Father, Gregory of Nyssa (c335–395) used Philo’s allegorical method and modelled some of his work on Philo’s.¹³⁴ The Latin Father Ambrose (c339–397), an important early influence on Augustine (354–430), used Philo ‘very considerably’.¹³⁵ Augustine himself, in his *City of God*, praised Platonist philosophy, and, although there appears to be no explicit reference to Philo, it is hard to believe that some of his ideas did not derive from him. Many Christians today seem to believe that Augustine invented for himself his famous ideas that time was created with the universe, and that creation had been instantaneous with the ‘days’ being understood as symbolical even on the ‘literal’ level of interpretation.¹³⁶ Actually, both ideas are in Philo. Philo also has the emphasis that the text says ‘one day’ not the ‘first day’ – a point repeated by many Christian Fathers (

127 “Introduction to the Commentaries of Origen”, Allan Menzies in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers* (Repr 1986).

128 See *Origen and the Jews* NR MDe Lange (1976) for more on Origen’s knowledge of Jewish teaching on creation.

129 *On First Principles*, Origen, bk iv ch 3. See also *Reason, Science and Faith* Paul Marston and Roger Forster (1999) ch. 7 for further comment on Origen and other early church figures on Genesis 1–3.

130 *Jerome’s Hebrew Questions on Genesis* C T R Hayward (1995) p.99.

131 *Ibid.*, p.17.

132 *Jerome’s Hebrew Questions on Genesis* C T R Hayward (1995) p.31 and Hayward’s comment on p.107.

133 *Ibid.*, p.111.

134 See Feargus O Fearghail “Philo and the Early fathers” in *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers* Thomas Finan & Vincent Twomey (1995) p.58.

135 See FH Coulson and GH Whittaker’s introduction to their translation of Philo (Loeb Vol 1 1929) p. xxi. and also Feargus O Fearghail “Philo and the Early fathers” in *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers* Thomas Finan & Vincent Twomey (1995) p.58–9.

136 *City of God*, Augustine Bk XI ch 7 etc, see also *Genesis in the Literal Sense* viii.1.

including even Basil, who claims to be very literalistic but allows indefinite length to 'one day').¹³⁷

Coming into the Mediaeval period, a crucial biblical scholar was the Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra (c1265–1349). Nicholas 'Christianized' much of Rashi's theology, and so did not take a literal view of Genesis 1 to 3.¹³⁸ The four senses of scriptural interpretation in Nicholas seem similar to Rashi's as cited above.¹³⁹ Nicholas was also a major influence on Luther (1483–1546) but this influence unfortunately did not manage to deter Luther from literalistic views on Genesis 1–3. Luther's commentary on Genesis shows, moreover, that he was conscious that in introducing his unusually literalistic interpretations he went against Augustine and Hilary (whom he describes as 'almost the two greatest lights of the church'), much of earlier Christian teaching, and Lyra who (Luther asserts) transmits Augustine's ideas on this.¹⁴⁰ Luther's literalism was certainly not in harmony with either a traditional Jewish approach or the mainstream earlier Christian tradition.¹⁴¹

Conclusions and Implications

This paper has illustrated that much of Jewish understanding of Genesis 1–3, in all the major strands of Jewish thinking, has found symbolism in the language of Genesis 1–3, even when dealing with the meaning of the text on a historical level. There are several reasons why this is relevant to conservative Christians today as they try to understand Genesis 1–3.

The first is that it may help us to understand the thinking of Jesus the Christ and the Rabbi Paul of Tarsus. Though the name and title 'Jesus the Christ' (Jesus the Messiah) was shortened to 'Jesus Christ',¹⁴² modern readers should not forget the sense which it still carried to the New Testament writers. Jesus was a Jew, born as their Messiah into the language, culture, and background which God had (through his chosen people) prepared for him. The Rabbi Paul, growing up as a Hellenistic Jew in the university city of Tarsus, was a Pharisee steeped in rabbinic understanding of the old Testament language, and never renounced his Jewishness or downplayed the racial and cultural background of his Lord (cf Rom 9:3–5 Acts 22:3). Both Jesus and Paul were, of course, very critical of aspects of some contemporary Jewish emphasis on ordinances¹⁴³, but surely their general use of language and linguistic thought forms must reflect the

137 *The Hexameron*, Basil, Homily 2; see also *Reason, Science and Faith* Paul Marston and Roger Forster (1999) ch. 7 on Basil.

138 *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* Herman Hailperin (1960) p. 145–152.

139 "The Four Senses of Scriptural Interpretation and the Mediaeval Theory of Preaching", *Speculum*, Harry Caplan (July 1929) p. 286.

140 See *Luther's Works* (Tr J Pelikan) (1959–86) Vol 1 p. 4.

141 See *Reason, Science and Faith* Roger Forster & Paul Marston (1999) p. 214 etc.

142 Cf *Reason, Science and Faith* by Roger Forster & Paul Marston (1999) p. 190.

143 But see eg Matthew 23:2. N T Wright in *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996) explores how Jesus' basic objection was that many focussed on ordinances rather than begin with spiritual life and practice flowing from a deep faith-relationship with God.

language and culture in which they were reared? Jesus and Paul would have grown up hearing the Targumic interpretation weekly in the synagogue, and Paul probably studied many of the pre-Christian works discussed in this paper. They underlie his use of phrases like 'the first Adam' and 'the second Adam' (Romans 5), and of the creation accounts. Later redactions of Jewish works, or later works drawing on similar early sources, can all cast light on this. As we have seen, such teachings also underlie some of the understandings of Genesis 1–3 by key Christian Hebrew and biblical scholars in church history, such as Clement, Jerome, Nicholas of Lyra etc.

The second is that it is impossible to separate Jewish understandings from Hebrew studies. The preponderance of Hebrew scholars in recent times seem to have taken Genesis 1–3 to contain significant elements of symbolic language, and those like James Barr who have been adamant that it was meant very literally seem motivated by anti-conservative sympathies.¹⁴⁴ But it is hard to avoid the feeling that those for whom the Hebrew language was a central part of their religious experience, who believed it to be the language of God, have something to teach us about its form and meaning. Some aspects of later non-Christian Jewish Biblical interpretation may (from a Christian perspective) be coloured by their need to avoid seeing (eg in Isaiah) a 'Jesus-like Messiah'. But there seems no obvious reason for views on creation to be so coloured.

The third relevant point can be illustrated with a quote from the *Creation Science Newsletter* April/May 1999 in which Ken Ham writes:

Recently one of our associates sat down with a highly respected world-class Hebrew scholar and asked him this question: 'If you were to start with the Bible alone, without considering any outside influences whatsoever, could you come up with millions or billions of years of history for the Earth and universe?' The answer from this scholar: 'Absolutely not!'

The use of this to support young-earth creationism is untenable for two reasons. The first is that (whilst the scholar was indubitably right) just sitting down with the Bible 'without any outside influences' one would not arrive either at a view that eg the earth is a minute sphere circling a smallish star on the edge of an obscure galaxy in the vastness of space, or that human heredity is due to billions of base pairs in a DNA double helix. Since the Bible was not meant to teach us such things, we have to find them out through observation within science. It is on this assumption that the mainstream Christian view of science has been based throughout history, and modern science was built. But the second reason is that it is demonstrably not true to imply that before the advent of modern science the 'natural' way for those who believed strongly in the inspiration of Scripture was to take Genesis 1–3 'literalistically' in the sense of 'creation science'. A recent book has shown this clearly for *Christian* interpreters who took a high view of scriptural inspiration,¹⁴⁵ but it seems just as true for major

144 *Reason, Science and Faith* Roger Forster & Paul Marston (1999) pp. 263–270 consider a number, including Barr.

145 *Reason, Science and Faith* Roger Forster & Paul Marston (1999) ch. 7.

(non-Christian) *Jewish* interpreters – who also had a very high view of Scriptural inspiration.

So who are the real ‘traditionalists’? Are they the present ‘young-earth’ creationists, who try to interpret Genesis 1–3 as though it were an engineering textbook? Or are they the Hebrew scholars, mainstream Christian commentators throughout history *and* leading Jewish commentators to whom such literalism seems inappropriate? The truth of Genesis 1–3 should surely be understood in a traditional Jewish-Christian sense, as a theological essay which addresses a very different set of questions from those addressed by contemporary science. Those who insist on “literality” and derive scientific meanings from the narrative are departing from the mainstream tradition of both Jewish and Christian commentary, which has been well established now for some 2000 years.

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