

WALTER C. KAISER JR AND
DORINGTON G. LITTLE



BIBLICAL
PORTRAITS
OF
CREATION

CELEBRATING THE MAKER
OF HEAVEN AND EARTH



ENDORSEMENTS

*“Kaiser and Little have done a big service to the evangelical community in setting forth a broad, biblical, and engaging presentation of the doctrine of creation. Their *Biblical Portraits of Creation* provides a refreshing picture covering important, but often neglected, biblical texts. Further, it contains some of the best material available on the historicity of the Genesis account of creation as opposed to contemporary critical and evolutionary denials. In addition, it captures the grandeur and majesty of the biblical text without stalling in the contemporary debate over the time of creation. Its roots are deeply embedded in good biblical exposition and blossom in fruitful and bountiful portrayal of the most basic of all acts of our omnipotent God—the creation of the heavens and the earth!”*

**Norman L. Geisler, professor of apologetics,
Veritas Evangelical Seminary**

*“Christians of all confessions refer to the God of the Bible as the maker of heaven and earth. *Biblical Portraits of Creation* explores the dynamic doctrine of creation from Genesis through the Psalms and Prophets to Jesus himself. Combining scholarly depth and pastoral wisdom, Kaiser and Little have given us here a beautiful call to praise—a hallelujah book!”*

**Timothy George, dean, Beeson Divinity School
of Samford University**

“The doctrine of creation holds crucial importance in the Christian theology of redemption. Kaiser and Little illustrate this point as they survey creation texts throughout the Historical, Wisdom, and Prophetic books of the Old Testament as well as in the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament. Their integration of the creation message throughout the Bible’s sixty-six books holds the key to resolving divisive contention over this topic among Christians. What’s more, it brings renewed excitement to integrative study of the whole Word of God. I heartily recommend this book to all Christians. Its contents, notes, and study questions make it an excellent resource for pastors, teachers, and Bible study leaders.

**Hugh Ross, astronomer, author, pastor,
and president of Reasons to Believe**

“The sermons published in this important book will help Christians read key biblical passages with fresh eyes, think more biblically about creation, and appreciate with renewed gratefulness the wonder of the world.”

**Eckhard J. Schnabel, Mary F. Rockefeller Distinguished Professor
of New Testament, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary**

WALTER KAISER JR. AND DORINGTON G. LITTLE

BIBLICAL PORTRAITS OF CREATION

CELEBRATING THE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH



Biblical Portraits of Creation: Celebrating the Maker of Heaven and Earth
© 2014 by Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Dorington G. Little

Published by
Weaver Book Company
1190 Summerset Dr.
Wooster, OH 44691
weaverbookcompany.com

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Cover design: StoryLook Design
Editorial, design, and production:
{ In a Word } www.inawordbooks.com
/edited by Katherine Pickett/

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kaiser, Walter C.

Biblical portraits of creation : celebrating the maker of heaven and earth /
Walter C. Kaiser Jr. & Dorington G. Little.—1st [edition].

pages cm

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-9891671-1-6

1. Creationism—Biblical teaching.
2. Creation—Biblical teaching.
3. Bible—Commentaries. I. Title.

BS680.C69K35 2014

231.7'65—dc23

2014000588

Printed in the United States of America

14 15 16 17 18 / 5 4 3 2 1

With thanksgiving to our Lord
for the special gift of
our wives:

Elizabeth A. Little

&

In memoriam

Margaret Ruth Kaiser (1932–2013)

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PREFACE

Walter C. Kaiser Jr.

It is a pleasure for Dr. Dorington Little and me to present this book to each of you as lay readers and pastors alike. In the providence of God, I had prepared six of these chapters as sermons that were given at the Cannon Beach Christian Conference in Cannon Beach, Oregon, in the summer of 2013. About this same time, my wife, Marge, who would shortly after this go to be with the Lord, urged me to listen with her to Dori's Sunday sermon on her iPod, which turned out to be a sermon based on Psalm 148. Previously, while we had lived and worked in New England, Marge and I had been blessed to be part of his church at the First Congregational Church of Hamilton (MA). But now that we had retired to Wisconsin, we had missed his sermons and the fellowship of the church immensely. But Marge was a faithful listener of Pastor Little's exposition of the Word of God.

As I listened to Dori's exposition of Psalm 148, it seemed as if I were being prompted by the Lord to call Dori on the phone and ask if he would like to join me as a contributor and as a coauthor in the project I had been working on called *Biblical Portraits of Creation*. His positive response set the stage for his contribution on Psalm 148 plus two more chapters, which are on Matthew 1:1–17 and 2 Corinthians 4:6 and 5:17, as well as many important revisions and additions to some of what I had already written.

So the result of our collaboration is by God's providence now in your hands. May each of you find the same joy we have found in bringing this material together for the honor and glory of our Lord.

To make this volume even more useful, a series of study questions and points for discussion have been added at the end of each chapter. Bible study is always much more valuable when it is done with others. So why

not form a small group and meet weekly in a home or a convenient spot and then share the answers to the study questions? Do one lesson each week. By so doing you will encourage each other and begin to experience the community and love of the body of Christ. Let us know what some of your experiences are as you enjoy God's Word in such a growth group. God bless you, each one.

PROLOGUE

THE HEAVENS ARE TELLING THE GLORY OF GOD

Walter C. Kaiser Jr.

The account of creation in the Bible is one of today's hottest topics. Unfortunately, the heated debate is too often carried on by evangelical scholars in seminars, either behind closed doors or in open forums of invective against fellow believers. What has raised this topic to the top of the list of issues for discussion is the outstanding success of the Human Genome Project, led by the evangelical Francis Collins in the 1990s. Ever since he and his team completed mapping out every gene in the human body (an amazing achievement by any standard), as was announced in 2001, under his leadership, the implications of this research for a biblical view of creation have loomed large in the thinking of many leaders in the community of faith. Added to this pressure has been the appearance of a new blog called "BioLogos," in which many evangelical scientists and theologians are involved. The effect of these two happenings has been a somewhat gentle disaffection from the view that God directly created the universe in favor of the revival of an old view, called theistic evolution, now, however, with some new twists.

It is not as if the scientific biological facts have all been in favor of one side or the other, but many evangelical theologians and exegetes are worried that once again the church will be caught off guard defending a view of origins just as it happened centuries ago when the church of that day argued that the earth stood still and was the center of the universe, instead of a heliocentric view of the universe, to the discomfort of Galileo. That, of course, proved to be disastrously incorrect. It is now being assumed that once again exegetes of Scripture will be caught off guard as they too defend what many now regard to be a view of creation that will not be sustainable in light of the facts discovered from genetic research.

However, compounding the problem is the fact that there has been a serious hiatus in the preaching mission of the church on the texts of Scripture that deal with creation. The negligence of the Church for including in its preaching mission interpretations and the application of some, or all, of the numerous biblical texts that deal with the Bible's claims for God's involvement in creation has often left the believing laity vulnerable to teaching that has often just plain vacated the topic of creation, or on the other hand has cast itself in violent reaction to any of the legitimate gains that science has made. Therefore, as a contribution to this much-needed topic, this volume on creation is set forth as an antidote for this hiatus.

This set of chapters contains teaching guides or preaching outlines that will serve as a stimulus to help God's people—and, hopefully, many spiritual shepherds—to get up to speed on how the Bible presents the topic of creation in all of its variations and what responses are called for by the believing community. After all, many of us recite each Lord's Day that we believe in "God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth!" What do we mean when we openly declare before God that this is our conviction?

Not only has the topic of creation been sadly neglected in our teaching and preaching ministries, but so has the whole corpus of Scripture been neglected, for there is a virtual famine of hearing and doing the Word of God in the land today (Amos 8:11). For example, in surveys taken by various pollsters, when asked in a multiple-choice question who gave the Sermon on the Mount, an overwhelming majority of respondents say Billy Graham instead of Jesus!

For some, this paucity of information in responding to the powerful Word of God may well be traced back to Marcion's attack on the Old Testament and the God of the Old Testament around AD 130, for he thought both the Old Testament and the God of the Old Testament were sub-Christian. Even though the church rejected these outrageous insinuations against the Old Testament and against God himself, nevertheless, a quiet emphasis began to build among the believing community that focused on the personal plan of salvation. Simultaneously, this shift quietly dropped any Christian thinking in terms of a personal Creator, the world, and creation itself, thereby handicapping our understanding of the new creation in Christ as well. Instead, the focus of biblical scholars fell

on the exodus from Egypt as being the central motif of Scripture, while the idea of creation and God's work in nature and his coming kingdom and the new heavens and the new earth were reduced to a secondary, or even to a lesser level, or else simply abandoned altogether. This, in turn, has produced a type of dualistic mentality in which the physical world is set in opposition to the spiritual world. Out of this fray, appearing as early as the middle of the second Christian century, came the church's early battle with Gnosticism. But even though the church generally won that battle, a residual aspect of this dualistic thinking has continued to haunt the church to this day. Nevertheless, the God of creation and the God of redemption are the same God we worship and find in Scripture.

Meanwhile, the church did continue to assert the ancient formulas of the creeds that said, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Christian believers today have repeated, often unthinkingly, the Apostle's Creed in church services, which harkens back to at least the fourth Christian century, a form that also was part of the Nicene Creed. So why do some believers now express such doubt and uncertainties over the identity of the one who made the earth, and all that is in it, or who was directly responsible for the entire universe by speaking it into existence by the word of his mouth? Why is there such strong and hostile antagonism and disputes recently over even the word *creation* itself among evangelical believers, and about who owns that word *creation*, whether the young earth group of creation-science, the old earth contingent of believers, or the theistic creation evolutionists? In fact, the polarization and entrenchment along party lines grows more divisive and acrimonious each day. This is happening even though a large number of believers continue to repeat each Lord's Day these same venerable lines of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, especially in many of our mainline churches, yet without any teaching that would further explain what we mean or intend to assert by this affirmation!

Historically, anyone who acknowledged that God made the universe and created the life on it was called a creationist. That meaning is still a valid use of the word. However, in the past several decades, a new meaning has emerged: for some, the term *creationist* is reserved for those who believe in a *recent* creation, or in *creation-science*, which requires treating the six days of creation in Genesis as six consecutive, literal twenty-four-hour periods of time, in which God created all things, with a date for

creation somewhere around 6,000 to 10,000 years before the present day. This group has also become known as the young earth group. They, too, are part of the body of Christ, of course, but their insistence on an earth of recent vintage, and a creation within the time span of one week, has unfortunately signaled a family feud that forces some to separate in their fellowship with believers of a different conclusion on these same matters, rather than a vigorous discussion with fellow believers, who are part of the body of Christ and who do affirm a view of origins that has God as the one who made all things by his speaking them into existence by the word of his mouth.

In the past two decades, another group of persons dealing with the issue of creation has emerged. Known as the Intelligent Design Movement (IDM), the group advocates that the real purpose and plan to all of life as we experience it today was created by an intelligent designer. This concept also has had a long history, for many in the past century or two have read William Paley's nineteenth-century *Natural Theology* (1802), in which Paley argues that there is so much design and purpose in the world of nature and its living organisms that it demands a maker who exhibits the intelligence and design abilities seen behind all the parts that make up this world. However, this IDM group, in its contemporary forms, generally declined to announce what this designer or maker's name might be. They hoped that this would remove all religious biases associated with their view and thus it would be allowed in America's public school classrooms as a neutral contribution to the discussion of origins. But this move was unacceptable to the American courts, just as it was for those who espoused creation-science, or the young earth view.

For Americans, the issue of creation versus evolution first went to the public forum of the courtroom in 1925, in the famous Scopes trial. The battle in this case was whether a teacher could teach evolution in American public schools. Advocates for creationism strenuously fought to prevent this view from entering public school classes in America. Evolutionists, however, decried this as a limitation on their freedom of speech.

Four additional court cases followed the 1925 Scopes trial: *Epperson v. Arkansas* (1968), *McLean v. Arkansas* (1981), *Aguillard v. Treen* (1983), and *Edwards v. Aguillard* (1987). In each of these four cases, the teaching of creation was pitted specifically against the First Amendment's establishment clause, which says:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

But if any harmony was to come among the people of God on the topic of creation, it would have to come, first of all, through a return to the teaching and solid exposition of Scripture in our churches, and then an accompanying careful study of all the scientific evidence in all its detail in our schools and institutions of higher learning.

What has complicated the profitable joining of this debate in the twentieth and now into the twenty-first century, is the hiatus or the absence of the general teaching on what the Scriptures have to offer on this subject. To reverse this severe problem in the body of Christ, Rev. Dr. Dorington Little and I have projected in this volume a series of expositions of selected texts that focus on the teaching of creation from the Scripture, ranging from the topic of origins to our new creation in Christ and ending in the new heavens and the new earth. If all sides in this debate are to be heard, it would seem reasonable to allow the actual teaching of Scripture to have the place of honor at the table, just as an offer should be made to all of the other contributors who work in science as well.

But the introduction of the teaching blocks of Scripture is not all that simple, for the issue of how to interpret these passages immediately emerges as the elephant in the room. Take, for example, the magnificent description of creation in Genesis 1. Should that piece be understood as pure poetry, a poem, or was it cast in the genre of a myth, an allegory, or was it meant to be a historical prose narrative? The answers to these hermeneutical questions will result in a wide difference in interpretation. Therein lies one of the reasons for a world of such wide difference in how to treat the biblical statements on creation, for each answer will lead to a different conclusion and reading of the text. But this must not discourage us, for this problem too is soluble.

In 1968 I wrote an article for the twentieth anniversary of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) titled “The Literary Form of Genesis 1–11,”¹ which is included in the Appendix. To be sure, there has been

¹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Literary Form of Genesis 1–11,” in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. Barton Payne (Waco, TX: Word, 1970), 48–65. The article has long since been out of print.

a lot of change in the meantime, but then again, much has remained the same as to the heart of the issues themselves. Among the numerous challenges that various scholars have posed for understanding these chapters has been the issue of the literary form (or in German, its *Gattung*) of Genesis 1–11, which was taken up in that 1968 article as well. But a battery of labels suggested for these chapters by various scholars seemed to fail, as some suggested *parable*, others *myth*, and still others *poetry*. Our conclusion was that there was every indication that the original writer meant these chapters to be understood as narrative prose, rather than as parable, myth, poetry, or even as borrowings from the ancient Near Eastern cosmological stories about the doings of the gods and goddesses of that ancient Near Eastern era.

Primary evidence for this bold assertion could be found first of all in the recurring heading given to this material in Genesis 1–11: “These are the generations/histories of,” an organizing rubric that appears strategically six times (Gen. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27). This form easily links Genesis 1–11 with the patriarchal narrative in Genesis 12–50, which uses the identical heading five more times (Gen. 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). This would indicate that the writer meant for his material in Genesis 1–11 to be treated the same way as the material in Genesis 12–50. These later patriarchal chapters were found to contain much more background material from archaeological writings that gave the selections a note of authenticity.

Nevertheless, the protests continued as some still tried to build a case for a poetic characteristic in these chapters of 1–11. But the prevalent and repeated contact with hard reality could still be seen in some sixty-four geographical terms, another eighty-eight personal names, forty-eight generic names, and at least twenty-one identifiable cultural items such as gold, bdellium, onyx, brass, iron, gopher wood, bitumen, mortar, brick, stone, harp, pipe, cities, a tower, and more. To get an idea of a contrast, note that the single chapter of Genesis 10 has five times more geographical detail than the entire book of Koran. The point is this: every single detail in the Scripture presents the possibility of either establishing the reliability of the biblical writer or proving its falsehood, for each of these geographical, personal names or cultural elements make the text vulnerable to falsification if they do not appear when and as they are claimed to exist!

This does not mean that there are no figures of speech or any figurative language in Genesis 1–11. In fact, E. W. Bullinger listed some 150

different illustrations of figures of speech in Genesis 1–11.² But the controls on interpreting these forms were not arbitrary. Rather, they could be conducted by accurately supplying the name of the trope from classical sources, supplying a definition of the figure of speech, and illustrating it both from biblical and classical sources.

But the occasional use of a figurative expression does not determine the whole literary form. Nor are we left to our own devices to determine what is or is not poetry or prose, parable or allegory. In the case of Genesis 1–11, it is surprisingly simple to determine that this is not poetry, but prose. The use of the Hebrew *waw* consecutive verbs to describe sequential acts, the frequent use of the direct object sign, the use of the so-called relative pronoun (few, if any, occur in Hebrew poetry), the stress of definitions, and the spreading out of the events in a sequential order—all of these are sure Hebrew indications that we are dealing with prose and not poetry. Say what we will, the author of Genesis 1–2 wanted his work to be viewed as a narrative-prose form, just as he wanted his narratives about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be understood in like manner.

All of this brings us to the acknowledged “Continental Divide” in biblical scholarship. The University of Chicago’s Langdon B. Gilkey wrote what must be regarded as one of the greatest religious articles in the twentieth century (which I for one am willing to affirm as being one of the greatest in the twentieth century). He confessed that his own stance on biblical matters and that of most modern liberal biblical scholars of his ilk were “half liberal and modern on the one hand, and half Biblical and orthodox on the other, i.e., its world view or cosmology [wa]s modern while its theological language [wa]s biblical and orthodox.” He went on to explain:

What has happened is clear: because of our modern cosmology, we have stripped what we regard as “the biblical point of view” of all its wonders and voices. . . . [W]e have rejected as invalid all the innumerable cases of God’s acting and speaking.³

² E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (1898; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 1032–33.

³ Langdon B. Gilkey, “Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 33 (1965): 152. This article is reprinted from *Journal of Religion* (1961): 194–205.

That analysis of the situation could not be more accurately stated. If progress is to be found in this discussion between science and biblical interpretation, priority must be given to the biblical writers' truth assertions and intentions and what they meant by their use of the words that they spoke on behalf of the God of heaven.

So we commend these chapters on Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Genesis, Isaiah, and the New Testament examples of Matthew and 2 Corinthians to each of you as probes to stimulate a whole new conversation on the Bible's extensive view on creation. And may these stimuli be used among laypersons, as well as among our pastors and teachers of the Word of God, to interact with the new findings of science. God is the source of everything that is true, so do not fear a possible intimidation from some unsuspected new findings from science that will blow a big hole in the case for "I believe in God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth!"



WISDOM WAS THERE BEFORE GOD CREATED THE WORLD

PROVERBS 3:19–20; 8:22–31

Walter C. Kaiser Jr.

In Proverbs 8, wisdom is not represented as a deity similar to Egypt's *ma'at*. Instead, wisdom is represented as a personification of one of God's attributes, one that was instrumental in his work of creating the world. Many in the history of interpretation have equated wisdom directly with Jesus Christ, but wisdom is only a personification of one of the divine qualities. The apostle Paul described the fulfillment of wisdom in Christ (Col. 1:15–20; 2:3), but wisdom was never raised to a separate person in the Godhead, as in a hypostatic union with Christ, nor was wisdom ever treated as if it were only another name for the second person of the Trinity. So it would be incorrect to view wisdom as the preincarnate person of Christ in Proverbs 8.

However, the supposition that wisdom, as it is depicted in Proverbs 8:22–31, is one of the key attributes that was present with our Lord as he created the world, can be seen first of all in Proverbs 3:19–20. In that text, not only is wisdom described as a quality in God's being, by which he created the world, but alongside the use of his wisdom is his understanding and his knowledge. These three gifts were used by God as he "marked out the foundations of the earth," "set the heavens in place," and "fixed securely the fountains of the deep" (8:27–29).¹ Certainly, this pointed to the fact that God alone was the sole initiator and the one forming all of

¹ All Scripture quotations for my chapters, unless otherwise indicated, are from the NIV.

this cosmos. Priority of place, however, was given to God's wisdom, for it came first in the order of things.

Proverbs 8:22–31 builds on the foundational statement already mentioned in Proverbs 3:19–20. But it takes the narrative of the creation of the world all the way back to the beginning, as 8:22–23 provides a summary of the fact that the Lord possessed wisdom even before the creation of the world. Then, in 8:24–31, the summary statement of the opening verses of Proverbs 3:19–20 is developed, as the passage gives a lengthier account as to how wisdom functioned as an agent of creation in the divine handiwork.

Focal Point: v. 22
 “The Lord brought me forth
 as the first of his works, be-
 fore his deeds of old.”

Homiletical Keyword: Actions

Interrogative: What?
 (What were the actions God
 took in using Wisdom as he
 created the world?)

- I. WISDOM CAME AS THE FIRST OF GOD'S WORKS (PROV. 8:22–23)
 - II. WISDOM WAS ESTABLISHED BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD (PROV. 8:24–26)
 - III. WISDOM WITNESSED TWO OF THE LORD'S MOST IMPRESSIVE CREATIVE ACTS (PROV. 8:27–29)
 - IV. WISDOM REJOICED IN ALL OF CREATION, ESPECIALLY HUMANITY (PROV. 8:30–31)
-

I. WISDOM CAME AS THE FIRST OF GOD'S WORKS (PROV. 8:22–23)

The meaning of “brought me forth” has been a warmly contested line ever since the controversy with Arius’s followers in the early church. Arius (ca. AD 250–336), who was of Libyan descent, was excommunicated because he used just such a clause as this one to declare that the Son of God was essentially inferior to the Father and was the first of God’s creations, as this wisdom text shows. This reduced God the Son to one who did not have eternal existence but one who had been born after God the Father.

The Hebrew word used here is *qanah*, which can mean “to create,” but most interpreters argue that in this context it means not “to create” but “to become a parent of,” “to procreate.” Therefore, if we understand this metaphor to mean “to become a parent of,” wisdom had to come from God’s essential being as part of his attributes. Wisdom has an organic connection with the very nature of God and his being.

Since wisdom existed before creation, it is distinct from creation and is accessible to humanity by the gift of revelation. But what is certainly denied here is that Yahweh had a sexual partner in the begetting of wisdom. Rather, wisdom came from God’s very being. All literal interpretations of this metaphor will lead only to a polytheistic rendering of this concept; understanding it as a metaphor makes better sense.

This procreation of wisdom was the first (Hebrew *re’shit*) in the time of God’s acts of working. Thus, God’s begetting of wisdom was the earliest of his deeds, even before God’s ancient deeds of making the universe (v. 22b). Notice how in John’s Gospel (1:1–3; cf. Col. 1:15–16), the Word (*logos*) was similarly world-creating in his work. This work God reviewed in Genesis 1:4, 9, 12, and elsewhere, and he pronounced all of it “very good.”

Wisdom was “appointed” (or “fashioned,” “formed,” Hebrew *nissakti*) way back in eternity (v. 23). All of this was “when the world came to be” (v. 23b). In this way wisdom could be present during the work of creation and witness all that God would do.

II. WISDOM WAS ESTABLISHED BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD (PROV. 8:24–26)

The second strophe wants to stress the fact that wisdom had its beginning long before the world began. Five time markers are given in verses 24–26 to show that wisdom preexisted the cosmos. The first time marker is “when there were no oceans” (v. 24a). Regarding the word “oceans” (or “depths,” Hebrew *tehomot*), some try to connect it with the primeval abyss, but the reference to springs in the parallel line of verse 24b suggests that “oceans” is intended here. It is important to notice that there is no reference to God contending with a chaos monster of the sea, as is found in ancient Near Eastern myths of origins.

The second time marker is found in verse 24b: “there were no springs abounding with water.” In much of the parched land of the Near East, nothing was more important to the sustaining of life as were those places where water springs up from the subterranean depths to water the earth, the animals, and humans. But Wisdom preceded the appearance of all of these springs.

Wisdom also predated the time when “mountains were settled in place” (v. 25a). The mountains are depicted as having their roots in the depths of the sea as they rise out of the waters (Ps. 104:6–8). Some regard the mountains as the oldest parts of the earth (cf. Ps. 90:1–2; Micah 6:2), but wisdom was ahead of them. The same claim could be made about the hills (v. 25b), for preceding them, wisdom “was given birth.” But what must not be missed is that wisdom was being used to create the world with its oceans, springs, mountains, and hills. The work of creation itself, however, was the work of God.

In verse 26 we come to the fifth time marker, but all of a sudden we are introduced to a “he,” who is the real agent of creation—he who made the earth and its fields. The word “made” is one of the common words (Hebrew *asah*) used in Genesis that refers to the Lord’s creative activity. Even more exciting is the fact that God made “the dust of the earth” (v. 26b). Could this text be referring to Adam, who was made from the “dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7)? Surely, Adam was made from the “dust,” but did this text allude to that event also?

Wisdom, no matter which way the form of expression is taken, claims to be older than the dust of the world. If this is indeed a veiled reference to the formation of Adam from dust, then this allusion to man coming from

the dirt surely indicates once again the fragility and mortality of mortals. Wisdom was first to appear in this world before men and women arrived.

III. WISDOM WITNESSED TWO OF THE LORD'S MOST IMPRESSIVE CREATIVE ACTS (PROV. 8:27–29)

Wisdom claims to have been present at two of the most spectacular events in creation: the making of the heavens and the placing of restraints on the power and extent of the seas. This indicates, at the very least, that the universe was made of the principles of wisdom. How foolish it would be for anyone to live contrary to the principles of wisdom.

Because wisdom was present at creation, she had an opportunity to contemplate and celebrate the way God decreed it and brought it all about. Not only did our Lord “set the heavens in place,” but he “marked out the horizon on the face of the deep” (v. 27b). Some have rendered the word “horizon” incorrectly as the “vault [of the heavens],” but that concept comes from Near Eastern mythology rather than from the Hebrew text itself.

God also “established” (or “made firm”) the “clouds above” (v. 28a), just as he also provided the ample water supply in the “fountains of the deep” (v. 28b). Moreover, God “gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command” (v. 29). Thus, God put limits on the sea so that it would not flood out the mortals he had made. The sea would be restrained for the good of the earth (cf. Job 38:10; Ps. 148:6; Jer. 5:22; Ps. 93; 104:6–9).

IV. WISDOM REJOICED IN ALL OF CREATION, ESPECIALLY HUMANITY (PROV. 8:30–31)

Verse 30 of Proverbs 8 forms an inclusion with verse 27: “I was there” and “I was constantly at his side.” Wisdom says, according to the Hebrew text, that she was “the craftsman” (Hebrew *‘amon*), but how shall we render this word? When God’s work is rendered as involving wisdom as a craftsman, it diffuses the message that the Lord was the creator of all things. So how could wisdom be called an artisan or a craftsman? It is best to render as a Hebrew Qal infinitive absolute meaning “to be firm,” “faithful.” Therefore, a more accurate rendering is “and I was beside him

faithfully; and I was delighting daily in celebrating before him at all times” (v. 30, emphasis mine). Wisdom was delighting in God’s handiwork in creation “day after day” (or “daily”), which implies that creation took place over a period of time. In fact, wisdom did not stop celebrating the fact that God had created it all.

But what wisdom especially rejoiced in was the creation of “man-kind” (v. 31b). No reference is made to the image of God in mortals as being a reason for such celebratory joy, but something like this must have provoked wisdom’s delight and joy.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Before God made the world, he brought forth wisdom as if it were one who would be alongside him to witness all his work.
2. God is described as the maker of heaven and earth in all of its provisions.
3. Wisdom rejoiced especially in the creation of man and woman.

STUDY QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. How does wisdom function in these texts? Is wisdom just another name for the second person of the Trinity, a personification of an attribute of God, or was it a literary convention of that day?
2. How did the Arian heresy misuse the expression in Proverbs 8:22, “brought me forth”? What is the correct understanding of the phrase?
3. What were the five markers given in Proverbs 8:24–26 to show that wisdom preexisted the origin of the cosmos?
4. What, according to this text, were two of the most spectacular events in creation at which wisdom was declared to be present? What significance is attached to wisdom’s presence at that time (Prov. 8:27–29)?
5. How does Proverbs 8:30–31 represent the part that wisdom played in the creation events?
6. In what part of the creative order did wisdom find her highest celebratory joy? Discuss why you think this is true.

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Cover design: Kris Nelson
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ISBN 978-0-9891671-1-6
\$15.99
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9 780989 167116