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CHAPTER ONE

“SUGGESTIONS FOR GENESIS
2:1–3, 8:11 AND 39:6”

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I

SUGGESTIONS FOR GEN 2:1–3, 8:11 AND 39:6¹

Genesis 2:1-3

וַיִּכְלֹוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צְבָאָם:

Thus the heavens and the earth
and all their host were *perfected*.

וַיִּכַּל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי

[מ]מְלֵאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

And God was *fatigued* on the seventh day
[from] his work which he had done;

וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי

מִכָּל-מְלֵאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:

so God rested/desisted on the seventh day
from all his work which he had done.

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי

וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְלֵאכְתּוֹ

אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת [לְעֲשׂוֹת MT]

God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it,
for on it he rested from his work—
which God had created *to sustain life*.

Repetition is well used in these two verses. Five words (אֱלֹהִים, הַשְּׁבִיעִי, יוֹם, כָּל, and מְלֵאכְתּוֹ) appear three times, with מְלֵאכְתּוֹ coming twice. In addition אֲשֶׁר, עָשָׂה, and שָׁבַת occur twice. These repetitions notwithstanding, commentators have questioned the repetition of the verb “to finish” in the

statements “the heavens and earth were *finished*”(2:1), followed by “God *finished*” (2:2). Skinner (1951: 37), in agreement with a tradition going back to Ibn Ezra, translated the וַיִּכַּל of Gen 2:2 in a negative sense, as God “desisted from” or “did not continue” his work. Speiser (1964: 5 and 7) translated the וַיִּכַּל of 2:2a as “brought to a close” and “brought to a (gratifying) close,” suggested by the Akkadian *šuteṣbû* used in the sense of “inspect and approve,” but without any lexical or cognate support. The אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא . . . לַעֲשׂוֹת of 2:2b Speiser paraphrased simply as “which he had undertaken.”

The first bold italicized word in the translation at the beginning of this article is suggested by Targum Onkelos (Berliner, 1884: 2) which reads in part, וַאֲשֶׁתְּכִלְלוּ . . . וַיִּשְׂי. The first verb is a Shaphel reflexive of כָּלַל “to crown, to finish, to perfect”; the second is a Shaphel of יָצָא, meaning in this form “to finish, to complete,” like the Shaphel reflexive אֲשֶׁתִּיִּצִי “to be finished” cited by Jastrow (1903: 1567). Although the MT *Pu^cal* plural וַיִּכְלְלוּ in 2:1 and the *Piel* singular וַיִּכְלַל in 2: 2 appear to be from כָּלַה “to be complete, to be finished” (BDB 447), the וַיִּכְלְלוּ is more likely to be from כָּלַל “to perfect, to complete,” as interpreted in the Targum and found in Ezek 27:4 (כָּלְלוּ יְפִיךָ) “they made perfect your beauty”). Having been told repeatedly (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) that “God saw that it was *good*” and once, in summation, (1:31) that “God saw all that he had made, and behold it was *very good*,” the verb “perfected” indicates not only the completion of the creation but hints at the goodness of the created order.

The MT וַיִּכָּל in 2:2 needs to be repointed as וַיִּכָּל and derived also from כָּלל. However, the narrator shifted the verb from כָּלל stem I (“to perfect”) to כָּלל stem III, “to be tired, fatigued, weary.” This כָּלל is the cognate of the Arabic كل (*kalla*) “he was, or became, fatigued, weary, tired” (Lane 1893: 3002; Wehr 1979: 977). In view of the use of عن (*‘an*) “from” with this verb, it seems best to restore an initial מ (= “from”) to the MT מִלְאֲכָתוֹ “his work,” which could easily have been lost by haplography.

The weariness of God after six days of creating is hinted at in Exo 31:17 which speaks of God’s “taking a breather,”

עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ
וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת וַיִּנְפֹּשׁ:

Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he stopped and refreshed himself.

What was only insinuated in Exo 31:17 was once quite explicit in Gen 2:2, i.e., before כָּלל, stem III, dropped out of tradition, translations, and Hebrew lexicons.

The theme of fatigue among the gods is dominant in the *Atra-Hasīs* creation myth, which includes the following lines (i 1-4; iii 162–163) as translated by Lambert and Millard (1969: 43, 49):

When the gods like men
Bore the work and suffered the toil—
The toil of the gods was great,
The work was heavy, the distress was much—
... they suffered the work day and night
... Excessive [toil] has killed us;
Our work [was heavy], the distress much.

The threat of a revolt by the work-wearied gods against the high gods of leisure eventuated in the creation of the *lulu*, “human beings” whose labor would permit all the gods to stop work and rest.

The Genesis and Babylonian traditions were in agreement that the *work* of God/gods led to divine *fatigue*, followed by divine decision(s) to give *rest* to the weary. In the *Atra-Ḥasīs* epic only the gods were granted this rest; whereas, in the Genesis tradition not only did God rest, but those created in his image were gifted with the rest of a seventh day Sabbath. (Theological concerns about an omnipotent God’s becoming weary have to be addressed in the same manner as that of an omniscient God being forgetful at times, as noted in Gen 9: 14–15 and the prayers which plead, “Forget me not, O Lord.”)

The phrase **לַעֲשׂוֹת אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר־בְּרָא** in Gen 2:3, meaning literally, “which God created to make,” is awkward. The Septuagintal reading, ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ θεὸς ποιῆσαι “which God began to make,” reflects a *Vorlage* having **בְּרָא** for the MT **בְּרָא**. Hebrew **בְּרָא** appears in I Kings 12:33 (with **עָשָׂה**) and in Neh 6:8, meaning “to invent, to devise” (BDB 94: KBS I: 109). It is the cognate of Arabic **بَدَأَ** (*badaʿ*) “he began” (Lane 1863: 163–165), which appears in the *Qurʾan*, *Sura* 32:6, “He *began* the creation of man from clay,” and as a title of God, **المبدئ** (*ʾalmubdiʿu*) “the Creator, the Originator.”

English translations have played freely with the finite verb **בְּרָא** and the infinitive **לַעֲשׂוֹת**. The KJV, NKJV, NAS, NAV RSV, NRSV, NIV and NIB render **לַעֲשׂוֹת** as the finite verb “(he) made”; the RSV, NRSV, NAB, and NLT read **בְּרָא** as the noun “creation,” while the NIV and NJB translate it as the participle “creating.” The consonantal MT can be retained here, with the finite **בְּרָא** intact, once another Arabic cognate

comes into focus, similar to the way an Arabic cognate clarified the Septugintal reading of ברא as ἤρξατο “he began” (discussed above).

As indicated in the opening translation, the MT לַעֲשׂוֹת “to make” needs to be repointed as לַיעֲשׂוֹת, i.e., the preposition ל attached to עֲשׂוֹת, an abstracted noun meaning “livelihood, life, the sustenance of life.” This עֲשׂוֹת is the cognate of Arabic (1) عاش (‘āšā) “he became possessed of life,” (2) عيش (‘aiš) “life, that whereby life subsists; the means of life or subsistence, livelihood, the way of living,” (3) عيشة (‘aišat) “a state of life,” (4) عايش (‘āiš) and (5) عياش (‘ayâš) “having much of the means of life, living well” (Lane 1874: 2210; Wehr 1979: 775). The contraction of the diphthong in עֲשׂוֹת to עִישׁוֹת, coupled with *scriptio defectiva*, resulted in the homograph עֲשׂוֹת/עִישׁוֹת, which was subsequently read as the infinitive of עָשָׂה “to make,” rather than being read as the rare synonym of חַיִּית “life, living, livelihood” (Jastrow 452).

This עֲשׂוֹת “the means of life/subsistence” in Gen 2:3 provided a summation of Gen 1:29–30, which spelled out in detail how God had provided sustenance for every נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה “living creature”—for birds, beasts, and human beings. This עֲשׂוֹת also provides the transition to Gen 2:5–16 which deals with subsistence issues: mists, rain, water, rivers, food, food trees, and a garden. According to Genesis 1–2, God had indeed created *to sustain life*.

Genesis 8:11

One word in the phrase עֵלֶה־זַיִת טָרֵף in Gen 8:11 has proven to be very problematic. The עֵלֶה־זַיִת is without a doubt “an olive leaf,” but the טָרֵף has been variously rendered. The Septuagint has φύλλον ἐλαίας κάρφος, “an olive leaf, a dry twig,” with the κάρφος (= טָרֵף) being not just a twig but a *dry* twig, “such as birds make their nest of” (Liddell and Scott 881). The Septuagint translators were evidently aware of the טָרֵף which was the cognate of Amharic *tarufa* “sprig, branch” (KBS II: 380). The Vulgate used four words to translate the three Hebrew words: *ramum olivae virentibus foliis*, “green leaf olive branch,” with the טָרֵף being read as “green, verdant,” as though the text had תֵּרֵף, a noun with a preformative ת from יֵרֵף “green,” a cognate of the Arabic وارق / ورق (*waraq/wâriq*) “leaves, foliage/ green, verdant.”

The NKJ, NRS, RSV, NIV, NIB translated the phrase as “freshly plucked olive leaf” (with the NAS, NJB, and NAU having “freshly picked olive leaf”). In the opinion of this writer only the “fresh olive leaf” of the NLT is correct, although, in light of NLT translation of Ezek 17:9 (see next paragraph), it appears to have been just a good guess.

The MT טָרֵף is a homograph for two distinctly different words. One word comes in Gen 37:33 חָיָה רָעָה אֲכָלָתָהּ יוֹסֵף טָרַף יוֹסֵף, “a wild animal has devoured him, Joseph has *surely been torn in pieces!*” The second טָרַף occurs in Ezek 17:9, וְיִבֹשׁ כָּל־טְרֵפֵי צִמְחָהּ, “all the *fresh ones* of her sprouting will wither” (n.b., the NLT has simply “its leaves wither,” completely ignoring the טָרַף). This second טָרַף is

the cognate of Arabic طريف (*tarīf*) “a thing that is *good* [*and recent or new or fresh*]” and طريفة (*tarīfat*) “*anything new, recent, or fresh*” (Lane 1974: 1845; KBS II: 380).

The “freshly plucked/freshly picked,” in the translations noted above, is an unnecessary doublet of (1) “freshly” (= טרף, stem II) and (2) “plucked” (= טרף, stem I). With the olive leaf being in the mouth of the dove, it was obviously severed from the tree branch. The leaf’s being new and fresh was evidence that the flood waters had abated.

Genesis 39:6

As indicated in the following statement, the relationship between Potiphar and Joseph was one of Potiphar’s complete trust and Joseph’s full responsibility.

וַיַּעַזֹּב כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ בְּיַד-יוֹסֵף

And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand;

וְלֹא-אֵדָע אֶתֹּו מֵאַחַד

(KJV) and he knew not ought he had

(NAB) he gave no thought, with Joseph there

(RSV) and having him he had no concern for anything

(NJB) and with him there, concerned himself with nothing

(NIV) with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself

with anything

καὶ οὐκ ᾔδει τὼ καθ' ἑαυτὸν οὐδὲ

and he did not know of anything that belonged to him

כִּי אִם-הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר-הָיָא אוֹכֵל

except the food which he ate.

As is evident from the paraphrases cited above, the second phrase of Gen 39:6, וְלֹא-אֵדָע אֶתֹּו מֵאַחַד (literally, “he did not know with him anything”) is problematic. The reason for

the difficulties is that the לֹא and the יָדַע are homographs of distinctly different words. The unvocalized לֹא can be read as the negative particle לֹא “not” or as the emphatic לֹא־לֵי “surely verily, indeed.” The יָדַע is a homograph of (1) the verb “to know,” as in I Sam 21:3, אִישׁ אֶל־יָדַע מְאוּמָה אֶת־הַדָּבָר, “let no one know anything about the matter,” as well as (2) the verb וָדַע / וָדַע which is the cognate of the Arabic وَدَعَ / يَدَع (*wadaʿa / yadaʿa*) “to entrust, to consign for safekeeping” (Lane 1893: 3051; Wehr 1979: 1240)². The consonantal MT וְלֹא־יָדַע אֶתּוֹ מְאוּמָה can readily be translated, “he would actually/indeed *entrust* to him anything.” The כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ and the מְאוּמָה, together, make for “anything and everything” being *entrusted* to Joseph—except, as noted, the food which Potiphar ate.

NOTES

1. Mr Gilad Gevaryahu (private communication) called my attention to the problems in Gen 2:1–3 and 8:11. He suggested that the וַיִּכַּל אֱלֹהִים . . . מְלֶאכְתּוֹ in Gen 2:2 could mean “God assessed . . . his work.” This proposal, however, lacks corroborating lexical support. The issue raised concerning Gen 8:11 was the Septuagintal reading which put an *olive leaf* (and) a *twig* in the beak of the dove, whereas the Hebrew text has only a *torn-off olive leaf*. Arabic cognates, presented in this study, clarify these problems and permit alternative translations.

2. KBS II: 390–392 referenced the Arabic وَدَعَ (*wadaʿa*) “to put down,” but made no reference to forms IV and X “to deposit, to leave for safekeeping, to give something in charge of someone” or the nouns وَدَع (*wadʿ*) “depositing” and وَدِيعَةٌ (*wadiʿat*) “trust, charge, deposit.”