

Creation Contradictions?

by Dr. Bernard E. Northrup

Man Before Plants?

Many have been troubled about the apparent contradiction concerning the order of creation in the accounts of Genesis one and two. There are two texts in chapter two which, in translation, appear to teach contrary to that revealed in chapter one. In both cases, the problem lies in the manner in which the Hebrew text was translated. In Genesis 2:5 a negative particle is twice translated as if it were a preposition. The verse reads in the common translation: "And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew; for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground." The negative in question is underlined. The Hebrew particle *terem* found here means "not yet." One readily can see that "before" conveys that sense of time with only a slight shade of change of thought.

When is the time which is referred to in this way? When had not the shrubs of the field come to be? When had not the field herbs come to sprout forth? The reference clearly is to that time just before the creation of man, ". . . For the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground." It can only refer to the time between the fourth and the sixth days, according to the context of the first chapter.

Regrettably, some have used verses 5 and 6 to prove that it never rained between the creation and the Noachic flood. While that may be, it should not be proven by these verses. Their time frame specifically is delineated as preceding the Divine activity which is found in verse 7.

Why then does the verse discuss the fact that plant life had not yet sprouted forth (the meaning of the verb translated "grew")? A *possible* solution follows: In the creation of the plant life which is described as happening on the third day, the creative act of planting vegetation did not take place all over the world but specifically in the garden. The landmass had just risen out of the sea in that same day (Gen. 1:9-10).

The process of draining and drying continued over many days. The moist state of "the field" and of the rest of "the earth" clearly is implied in Genesis 2:5-6. It was still so wet outside of the garden over "the whole face of the ground" that "a mist went up from the earth." Psalm 104 describes this process of the uplift and drainage of the landmass *after* describing the Lord's initial covering of it "with the deep as with a garment" when "the waters stood above the mountains" (Ps. 104:6) of the newly-created earth (Ps. 104:5).

The Psalmist says: "At thy rebuke they (the waters) fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away. The mountains went up; the valleys went down unto the place which thou hadst founded for them" (Ps. 104:7-8, literal). Now the water-soaked hills drained. Springs began to flow. "He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills" (Ps. 104:10), providing for the needs of the animals as they are created (Ps. 104:11-18). Thus the suggestion is that the creative activity of the third day resulted in the placing of plant life in the Garden of Eden in preparation

for the habitation of the air with birds, the sea with its swarming creatures, and the land with the animals and man. Genesis 2:5-6 would then be describing the condition of the earth *outside* of the garden in those days before the creation of man.

But does not the text of Genesis 2:8-9 specifically say that the garden was planted *after* man is formed out of the dust of the earth? The problem of interpretation which allows one to conceive the idea that man was created before plant life (which contradicts Genesis 1:9-31) arises out of the real time relationship of verses 8-9 to verses 6-7. The entire text reads in the King James Version:

"And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil."

To the English reader it appears obvious that there is no way of harmonizing this statement that vegetation was created after man with these statements in Genesis one. "And God said, Let the earth bring forth vegetation, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth vegetation, and herb yielding seed after its kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after its kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day" (Gen. 1: 11- 13). Man's creation is described as taking place later in the sixth day. "And God said ' Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that reepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them And the evening and the morning were the sixth day" (Gen. 1:24-27, 31).

Man Before Animals?

This passage in Genesis one is also important in considering the second apparent contradiction which some have thought to find in chapter two: that Adam was created before the animals. The text causing the confusion is Genesis 2:19. After the Lord's comment on Adam's unsatisfactory state in having no mate (v. 18), the Lord God now provided him a mate. "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an helpmeet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up

the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man" (Gen 2:19-22). Thus it sounds as if the animals are created after Adam and before Eve. What is the solution? Is this proof that the Bible is untrustworthy? Or does the answer lie somewhere in the transition made when the Hebrew original was rendered into the English language?

The Linguistic Problem

The solution is one which will not satisfy some who will think that any suggestion concerning the original language is an attack upon the integrity of the Word of God. But the writer is one who has diligently studied in and then taught the three original languages of the Bible, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, for nearly 40 years with one goal. That goal is to better understand the intended meaning behind the numerous difficult statements found in our King James translation. These apparent contradictions which appear to be inescapable in our translation simply are examples of a translation problem caused by an inadequate grasp on the part of the translators of certain very important facts about the Hebrew language.

Most English readers do not recognize the nature of the task of translating from one language into another with a very different grammatical structure. It could be likened to the difficulty which our American astronauts would have met on attempting to dock with the Russian cosmonauts had there not been some very careful cooperative planning and engineering on the locking ports of both vehicles beforehand.

English is a language that conveys a rather precise announcement of the time values which are involved in every statement of its sentences. Hebrew, to the uninitiated English student, is remarkable in that it does not use phonemes in its verb system which signal to the reader such concepts as present, past, future, previous present, previous past and previous future, subsequent past and subsequent future. These elements are not at all conveyed by the verb system. Rather the writer (and speaker) depended upon context and occasionally an adverb to convey such ideas. It was impossible unequivocally to say with English precision: "I had fallen from the tree before I hit the ground." A Hebrew student would have said: "I fell from the tree before I hit the ground." He would marvel that the English language student would find it beneficial for the speaker to explain any further that the one action preceded the other! Nonetheless, to the English mind, such an explanation is expected since the reader is used to finding these precise time relationships defined in his language. Thus he instinctively places one action before another in his mind when he reads: "Now the Lord *had* said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country" (Gen. 12:1). The Hebrew reader sees no such grammatical structure, yet, if alert, immediately recognizes the same time relationship.

The Apparent Contradictions Resolved

It is this disparity in time structure between the two languages which causes the translation problem and the apparent contradiction to appear on the surface of our English translation of Genesis 2. Oddly enough, the translators of the King James recognized the grammatical principle above by supplying "had" in Genesis 12:1. It is regrettable that "had" was not placed in italics to indicate that there actually is no comparable form in the original text, the normal mode of these

translators in supplying an element for the reader's understanding. These men knew from the context that the revelation from God which required Abram's departure from Ur of the Chaldees was given before his departure in obedience to that command. Thus they translated it: "Now the Lord **had** said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country So Abram departed, as the LORD **had** spoken unto him. . . ." (Gen. 12:1, 4). In the same way these translators recognized in Genesis 3:1 that the creation of the beasts of the field had taken place before the demonstration of the subtlety of the serpent. Thus they have translated: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God **had** made."

This practice of supplying helping verb forms in the English language was carried on by the King James translators with fair regularity as context demanded it. Genesis 2:8-9 contains an example of it in the phrase, ". . . there he put the man whom he **had** formed." But herein lies the crux of the problem. ***There are two other verb forms in these two verses where context should have required the supplying of the previous past helper, "had".***

The context of chapter one should have required the verses to be translated: "Now the LORD God **had** planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God **had** made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil." Recognition of the fact that chapter one places these creative activities in the third day of creation would have totally eliminated the difficulty which some doubters have when they come to read this "apparent contradiction" in the Word of God.

The second apparent contradiction found in Genesis 2 seems to require the placing of the creation of man before the creation of the animals (Gen. 2:18-20). By now the reader should suspect the problem which causes the English reader the difficulty. Yes, again it is the failure of the translators to acknowledge the government of prior revelation upon the way that they translated these verses. The following is a suggested partially expanded translation of these verses which completely resolves the apparent contradiction by following the very principles followed elsewhere by the King James translators.

"And the LORD God said, 'Man's being alone is not good. I will make for him an helper as his counterpart. Now the LORD God **had** formed from the ground every living creature of the field and every fowl of the heavens and he **had** brought (them) unto the man to see what he would call each one. And whatsoever the man **had** called each living creature, that (became) its name. And the man **had** given names to every cattle and to the fowl of the heavens and to every living creature of the field, but for man there **had** not been found a helper as his counterpart. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and he proceeded to sleep. And he took one from his ribs and he closed up the flesh in its place. And the LORD God built the rib which he **had** taken from the man into a woman, and he brought her unto the man."

Now it can be readily seen that the specific purpose of Adam's newly-appointed task of naming the animals and birds was to prepare him psychologically to recognize his need of a wife! By the time the young bachelor had reviewed all of creation's pairs, there had fallen a heaviness over his spirit. He had recognized that he alone of all God's created beings did not have a counterpart! He now was prepared for the crowning act of creation and for the presentation of his wife to him as

he awoke from the first surgical operation. He knew that he needed a wife and gladly received her as such from the hand of the Creator.

Now it also can be seen that the imagined contradictions found in Genesis 2 simply are the result of inconsistent application of perfectly normal translation principles and that there really is not any contradiction here at all. As revealed, God's word is fully and completely inspired and accurate even to the very words chosen. It is trustworthy and authoritative for our lives as we seek to serve the One who gave it through holy men of old (11 Pet. 1:21).

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