

BASTIAAN JONGELING

SOME REMARKS ON THE BEGINNING OF GENESIS I, 2*

The beginning of the book of Genesis has always given rise to various discussions¹. Questions were asked about the syntactical order of the first three verses: Is verse 1 an independent sentence or is it subordinate to verse 2 or even to verse 3, verse 2 in the latter case being a parenthetical clause²? On verse 1, if taken as a linguistically independent statement, the opinions differ: one can take this verse as the beginning of the creation story and consequently consider 'the earth' of verse 1 to be 'the waste earth' of verse 2; one can also take verse 1 as a kind of superscription or rather as a concise proclamation regarding the entire work of creation.

Furthermore there are divergent opinions as to the meaning of the different parts of verse 2: What is the sense of *tôhû wābôhû*, and of *rû'ah 'elôhîm*, and what does the participle *m'raḥêfêṭ* mean?

I do not intend to treat those problems in full here, but restrict myself to some remarks on the beginning of verse 2. Nevertheless,

* I express my thanks to Dr. C. J. Labuschagne, Haren (Gr.), who corrected my English.

¹ For the literature see Claus Westermann, *Genesis* (Biblicher Kommentar Altes Testament), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1974 (the first two fascicles of which appeared in 1966 and 1967 respectively), pp. 104—107.

² There are three possibilities:

a. Verse 1 is an independent sentence: „In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”, followed by verse 2: „Now the earth was waste and void ...”;

b. Verse 1 is subordinate to verse 2: „When God began to create the heaven and the earth, the earth was waste and void ...”;

c. Verse 1 is subordinate to verse 3: „When God began to create the heaven and the earth — now the earth was waste and void ... — God said: Let there be light!”

before doing so, I may express as my opinion that verse 1 is an independent sentence indicating the whole work of creation by a stroke of the pen. Admitting that it is not possible to argue this on purely linguistic grounds³, I may adduce the following points:

1. Everywhere else the expression 'the heaven and the earth' denotes the universe as we see it above and around us, of which we ourselves form part (see especially Ex. XX, 11: „in six days the Lord made heaven and earth ...”, and cf. Ex. XXXI, 17)⁴;

2. The fact that the word *rē'sît* has no article does not prove that it must be considered to be in the construct state. It is true that *rē'sît* occurs in the construct state in expressions such as: „In the beginning of the reign of ...” (Jer. XXVI, 1: XXVII, 1); „The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. CXI, 10; Prov. I, 7), and also with the meaning 'first-fruit' („the first-fruit of all the produce of the soil”, Deut. XXVI, 2), but we also find expressions such as: „Declaring the end *mērē'sît* (i.e.) from the beginning” (Is. XLVI, 10). There are several instances of such words being used without the article: *mērō's* 'from the beginning' (Is. XL, 21; XLI, 4. 26; XLVIII, 16); *miqqèdèm* 'from ancient times' (Is. XLVI, 10); *mē'ōlām* 'of old' (Is. XLVI, 9); *le'ōlām* 'for ever' (Gen. III, 22; VI, 3). It seems that the Israelites did not deem it always necessary to use the article in such expressions.

Now coming to the beginning of verse 2 we may first observe that the sentence has the form of a circumstantial clause: the

³ Cf. Westermann, op. cit., p. 109: „Die bisherige Diskussion hat gezeigt, dass mit grammatischen und mit syntaktischen Argumenten allein die Frage des Verhältnisses der ersten Sätze zueinander nicht zu lösen ist”, and p. 133: „Verfolgt man nun die ganze Reihe von Versuchen, das Verhältnis von Vers 1 zu Vers 2 syntaktisch zu klären, so wird ganz deutlich, dass eine bloss grammatisch-syntaktische Lösung hier nicht mehr möglich ist ...”

⁴ The interpretation which I heard some time ago, that the expression „the heaven and the earth” of Gen. I, 1 indeed designates the whole universe, but that we have to imagine that the fall of the angels happened between what is described in verse 1 and verse 2, and that the situation of the earth described in verse 2 was the consequence of this fall, is not very likely in my opinion. In that case one would rather expect in verse 2: *watt'hî hā'āreš tōhû wābōhû* „but the earth became waste and void”.

copula *wē* followed by subject, verb and, if necessary, by predicate or object.

We give some examples:

In Gen. XVIII, 13 we read: „And the Lord said to Abraham: Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I really bear a child *wa'anî zāqantî* (i.e. literally:) and I have become old?” The end of the sentence means: „whilst the situation is such that I have become old”, or briefly: „now that I have become old”.

Gen. XXIV, 56 mentions that Abraham's servant, after having secured Rebekah for Isaac, said to her family: „Hinder me not *wēyhwh hišlāh dārkî* (which means:) and the Lord hath prospered my way”, that is: „whilst the situation is such that the Lord hath prospered my way”, or: „now that the Lord hath prospered my way”.

The circumstantial clause often contains a present participle, e.g. in Gen. XVIII, 1: „And the Lord appeared unto him (i.e. Abraham) ... *wēhû' yōšēb* (meaning:) and he (was) sitting (that is: whilst he sat) in the tent entrance”. This type of phrase also occurs in Gen. I, 2: „and the spirit (breath, wind) of God (was) moving upon the surface of the waters”, i.e. „whilst ... moved ...”

There are, however, also cases in which such a rendering does not fit, because the clause introduces a more or less new passage, or because it serves the purpose of a transitional remark necessary for understanding the narrative that follows. These two reasons may go together: when such a phrase stands at the beginning of a new passage, it is indispensable for understanding what follows. At all events, in such cases we have to do with independent sentences which do not really belong to the narrative proper. They serve as a kind of introduction making the narrative understandable. In my opinion the sense of such phrases is: For the right understanding of the following narrative the reader must know that ...

We give some examples:

Genesis XIII presents an account of the separation of Abram and Lot. Having mentioned that they left Egypt together and went to the Negeb, the text says: *wē'abrām kabēd mē'ōd bam-miqnēh* „... and Abram was very rich in cattle ...” This introductory remark cannot be dispensed with since the author wants his

readers to grasp the reason for the separation of Abram and Lot: the numerousness of the cattle. We might paraphrase as follows: „For the right understanding of the following account the reader must know that Abram ...”, or translate: „Now (you must know that) Abram was very rich ...”

In Gen. XLVIII, 10 we read: „Now Israel's eyes were dim for age ...” This remark is indispensable for the understanding of verse 17: Joseph thought that his father made a mistake.

We mention the rest of the examples briefly:

Gen. III, 1: „Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the beasts of the field”.

Gen. XXXI, 19: „Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep”.

Gen. XXXI, 34: „Now Rachel had taken the teraphim and put them in the camel's furniture”.

Gen. XXXVII, 3: „Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children”.

Numb. XXXII, 1: „Now the Rubenites had a multitude of cattle and the Gadites very much”.

Judges XI, 1: „Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior”.

1 Sam. III, 1: „Now the word of the Lord was precious in those days”.

1 Sam. IX, 15: „Now the Lord had revealed Samuel one day before Saul came ...”

1 Sam. XXVIII, 3: „Now Samuel was dead ... and Saul had put away the exorcizers and soothsayers out of the land”.

2 Kings V, 1: „Now Naaman ... was a great man with his master ...”

All these clauses have the same linguistic structure and express something that is absolutely necessary and indispensable for the right understanding of what follows. They contain a kind of prolegomena which the reader needs. In a way they are circumstantial clauses, but they have an independent character and cannot be translated by: „whilst ...”

There are, however, different nuances. Sometimes the subject has not yet been referred to, e.g. in the remarks regarding Jephthah and Naaman (see above). The writer starts a new section of his story, and introduces it by: „Now the reader has to know that ...” In 1 Sam. XXVIII, 3 we have to paraphrase: „Now the reader is reminded of the fact that Samuel had died, and further he must

know that Saul had put away the exorcizers ...” In Gen. III the serpent had not yet been introduced but mention had been made of the beasts of the field in general: „Well then, one of those beasts, namely the serpent, was the most cunning ...” In the cases of Jephthah and Naaman there is also a connection. The author recounts the acts of salvation accomplished by the Judges and the miracles of Elisha. So, when he reaches the point of telling a new salvation story (about Jephthah), and a new miracle story (about Elisha), he then introduces Jephthah and Naaman respectively.

Thus the copula *w*^e indeed establishes a connecting link between what precedes and what follows, but one cannot deduce from the copula itself the nature of the connection.

This is how we must understand the beginning of Gen. I, 2: „Now the earth was waste and void”. There is a connection with verse 1, but the copula does not make the nature of this connection explicit, and does not make plain that ‘the earth’ of verse 1 is ‘the waste earth’ of verse 2 as some exegetes assert. Verse 2 is rather an introductory remark to what follows: „Now the reader must know that the earth was waste and void ...” This remark is necessary for explaining to the reader that God brings forth the light, that He separates water and land, that He places sun, moon and stars in the sky, that He covers the earth with all kinds of vegetables etc.

In my opinion Gen. I, 1 is a concise statement about the whole of God's work of creation, in which the expression ‘the heaven and the earth’ designates the visible reality. Verse 2 is an introductory remark which may be paraphrased as follows: „Now the reader must not think that this work was done in a trice; no, the earth was inhospitable and uninhabitable ...” The creation narrative itself then begins at verse 3.

Postscriptum. I think that *tōhū* here denotes the inhospitability of the earth (cf. Deut. XXXII, 10; Job VI, 18; XII, 24; Is. XXXIV, 11; XLV, 18), while *bōhū* approximately means the same. Like Hebrew, many other languages have rhyming or alliterative word pairs such as these: cf. in English: higgledy-piggledy; mouse and man; neither chick nor child; handy-dandy; hanky-panky; riff-raff; teeny-weeny; spick and span; hustle and bustle; in French:

pêle-mêle; ni enfants ni servants; ni enfants ni suivants; ni chien ni chat; in German: weder Kind noch Kegel; mit Mann und Maus; kreuz und quer.

„Darkness upon the surface of the flood” does not only mean that the waters had still free access onto the land, before God „shut up the sea with doors”, and „set bars and doors” to it (Job XXXVIII, 8. 10), but also that the light had not yet broken forth.

The *ruah* of God in my opinion is God’s breath, ready to become word, cf. Ps. XXXIII, 6: „By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth”.

JEAN CARMIGNAC

CRITIQUE TEXTUELLE DE PROVERBES 22, 8—9

Texte Massorétique

וְיָצַח עוֹלָם לְעוֹלָם 8 a
וְיָצַח עוֹלָם לְעוֹלָם 8 b
וְיָצַח עוֹלָם לְעוֹלָם 9 a
וְיָצַח עוֹלָם לְעוֹלָם 9 b

Septante³

- 8 a ὁ σπείρων φαῦλα θερίσει κακὰ
8 b πληγὴν δὲ ἔρχων αὐτοῦ συντελέσει
8 c ἄνδρα ἰλαρόν καὶ δότην εὐλογεῖ ὁ θεός
8 d ματαιότητα δὲ ἔργων αὐτοῦ συντελέσει
9 a ὁ ἐλεῶν πτωχὸν αὐτὸς διατραφήσεται
9 b τῶν γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ ἄρτων ἔδωκεν τῷ πτωχῷ
9 c νίκην καὶ τιμὴν περιποιεῖται ὁ δῶρα δούς
9 d τὴν μέντοι ψυχὴν ἀφαιρεῖται τῶν κεκτημένων

Verset 8, stique a

¹ Le ketib est וְיָצַח, le qeré וְיָצַח; le sens n'est pas modifié.

² Johannes-Bernardus De-Rossi n'indique aucune variante massorétique dans ses *Variae Lectiones Veteris Testamenti*, vol. II, p. 99 (Typographie Royale, Parme 1788).

³ Les éditions critiques de Cambridge et de Göttingen ne contiennent pas encore les Proverbes; on est donc obligé, hélas, de travailler avec les éditions non-scientifiques de Swete ou de Rahlfs.