

## OT Intro Exercise 1

Read Psalm 8. How does this psalm complement or interpret the creation accounts in Genesis 1-2? How does the *form* (narrative as compared to a psalm) affect what you would know and understand about the creation account?

Part of the aim of Genesis 1-2 is to be descriptive and provide insight into the issues of who God is, who humans are, and why this creation is as it is. The aim of Psalm 8 is praise of God who made humans and all of creation.

Ps 8 appears to be a reflection on the creation account in Genesis 1. Note that the references to “heavens,” “moon,” and “stars” do not occur in the Genesis 2 account. The reference to humans being given “dominion” over the things listed in Ps 8.6-8 is also only in Genesis 1. (It perhaps should not surprise us that this psalm used in Israel’s worship would reflect on the “Priestly” account of the creation.)

By virtue of its form as a psalm, however, we are not given and we do not expect a precise account of how creation occurred or the exact order in which it happened. What we do see is that verses 3-8 of the psalm focus on what is understood (and rightly so, I believe) to be the main interest of the creation account in Genesis 1. In the vastness of the universe, who are humans that God should have made us but “little lower than God” (though we note that this also is a clear statement that humans are not God and not even necessarily like God) and given us dominion over the earth and its creatures. It is this insight that leads into praise of God.

While a God-fearing ‘creationist’ and God-fearing ‘evolutionist’ may have differences over the interpretation of Genesis 1, both could likely affirm Psalm 8.

Form (narrative as compared to psalm) makes a difference!

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

<sup>2</sup> Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,  
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

<sup>3</sup> When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

<sup>4</sup> what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals<sup>1</sup> that you care for them?

<sup>5</sup> Yet you have made them a little lower than God,<sup>1</sup>  
and crowned them with glory and honor.

<sup>6</sup> You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet,

<sup>7</sup> all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

<sup>8</sup> the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

<sup>9</sup> O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Hugo van der Goes: “The Fall of Adam”

Look at this picture: [Temptation of Adam and Eve](http://cgfa.floridaimaging.com/g/p-goes3.htm) (somewhat lighter and clearer version at: <http://cgfa.floridaimaging.com/g/p-goes3.htm> ). What things do you observe about the painting that indicate a close reading of the biblical text? Note that this is a different 'form' (artistic rather than literary representation) of the account in Genesis 3. How does the *form* affect what you would know and understand about the story?

Van der Goes' depiction demonstrates a careful reading of the Genesis text.

- The fruit is nondescript (the text does not indicate what kind of fruit it was exactly), but it is attractive (which the text does say is the case – 3.6).
- Adam has a ruddier skin color than Eve. This is because Adam was formed from the *adamah* / ground while Eve was formed from Adam.
- The text says that Eve “also gave some [fruit] to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.” (Eve did not later tempt Adam to eat the fruit.)
- The snake has feet, because only in this way does the statement of God in 3.14 about the serpent crawling on the ground make sense.

As to form, the picture is nearly inexplicable without the Genesis text known in advance. The sinister ‘serpent’ and Adam and Eve’s nudity do suggest that something strange is going on here. Note, therefore, that the narration of the account in Genesis provides a comprehensible story line, but the artistic representation serves more to create a mood. Though reflecting a careful reading of the text, the artwork does represent an interpretation.

Additional Notes:

- The flower in the picture is an iris. According to legend, they grew from the tears of Eve as she left Eden. It is also a symbol of fecundity.
- This work is actually only half of a diptych altarpiece. The other half is a picture of “The Lamentation” or deposition of the body of Jesus. What is striking is the contrast between the lushness of the one background and the barrenness of the other. The tree and the cross are focal points in each and serve to make the theological connection between the two events. (Cf. <http://www.khm.at/system2E.html?/staticE/page731.html> )