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**Is there a Contradiction
between the two
Creation Accounts?**



Theological Accents

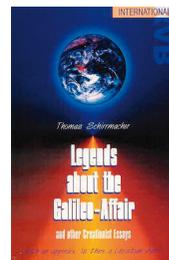
Theologische Akzente

Table of Contents

Inhaltsverzeichnis

A. Two Sources? Two Creation Accounts?	3
Review of Genesis 1:1–2,25	3
B. The supposedly contradictory verses Genesis 2:4–15	4
C. The supposedly contradictory verses Genesis 2:18–19	5
2 The Origin of Genesis	6
The ‘toledoth’ of Genesis	7
The Tablets and the Family Chronicles of Genesis	7
Annotation	11
The Author	13
Impressum	14

The thematic emphasis of the book is on the true background to the “Galileo Affair”. The book also includes further articles from the author on Creation Research, with a special focus on the Creation Account and the relevance Evolution thinking has had on ethics and cultural history.



Is there a Contradiction between the two Creation Accounts?

Thomas Schirrmacher

Is there a Contradiction between the two Creation Accounts?!

A. Two Sources? Two Creation Accounts?

The alleged contradiction between the two reports in Genesis 1 and 2 has unfortunately become the prevailing opinion of our society. Even various translations of the Scriptures have adopted it. The historical-critical theory assumes, on the basis of the names of God used in them, that the two narratives originated from separated sources, an elohistic one and a yahwistic one, and believes them to be two completely unreconcilable conceptions.

This kind of differentiation of sources cannot be generally refuted here,² but note that there is no justification for a differentiation on the basis of the names of God. ‘Elohim’ is a title, ‘Yahwe’ (usually translated ‘Lord’), a personal name. The so-called ‘second’ account in Genesis 2:5–25 makes this clear, for ‘Yahwe’ is not a substitute for ‘Elohim’, as many believe. Rather, the narrative continually speaks of “Elohim Yahwe” (the Lord God).³ This corresponds to the name, ‘Jesus Christ’, which also consists of a personal name and a title. Besides, dei-

ties and rulers in the ancient Near East frequently had several names. There were Egyptian pharaohs, for example, with 300 different ones.⁴

The question is, whether or not the two narratives essentially contradict each other. We assume that they form a unit, and will investigate the possibility that the writer’s knowledge of the first report explains the second. This discussion will translate and comment on the relevant verses, using the arguments of three excellent articles by Samuel R. Külling.⁵

If the two chapters are indeed complementary accounts, the first describes the creation of the cosmos, while the second narrates in detail the preparation of Man’s environment, and the creation of Woman. The second report mentions God’s creative activity, but only in verses 7 and 22. Otherwise, it refers to the Creation in its completed state.

A brief review of Genesis 1:1–2,25 will demonstrate this:

Review of Genesis 1:1–2,25

1:1 Proclamatory Title: God created the heavens and the earth

1:2–31 How God created the heavens and the earth (The six days)

- 2:1 Summary
- 2:2–3 The seventh day
- 2:4–25 How God provided for Man
 - 2:4–7 A garden planted for Man's home
 - 2:8 Man brought to the garden
 - 2:9–17 Description of Man's home
 - 2:18 The necessity of a helpmeet
 - 2:19–25 The creation of the helpmeet

It is typical of the style of the Bible and of other ancient Middle Eastern literature to first relate only the essential details of an event, and then to describe the details and the results in a second narrative. Jonah 3:3–9 is a good example. The first three verses, which describe the prophet's message and the people's fast, are followed by the narration of king's decision to decree the fast.

The second Creation account is thus not a repetition, but a resumption, a more detailed report of the events, and is also a necessary transition to the narration of the Fall in Genesis 3.

B. The supposedly contradictory verses Genesis 2:4–15

We will now turn our attention to the verses in Genesis 2 which are believed to contradict Genesis 1.

“This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created.” (Gen. 2:4a).

In spite of many discussions on the subject, it is trivial to ask whether this text is the conclusion of the preceding narration (“This is the account”), as D. J. Wiseman believes, or the introduction to the following one (“This is the history”)⁶ as long as the verse is taken by itself and not connected chronologically with verse 4b⁷. The contents seem to indicate that the expression, ‘toledoth’, means ‘that which became of’. If this is the case, then Genesis 2:4a, as a transition, makes it clear that the following account does not repeat the Creation account, but asks what became of the Creation of the heavens and the earth.

“At the time (or: on the day) that God created the heaven and the earth⁸, (5) there was not yet any plant of the field on the ground, and no green herb had grown out of the ground, for the Lord God had not yet caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not yet any man to till the ground” (Gen. 2:4b–5, Author’s translation).

These verses do not speak of plants in general, but only of cultivated plants which would grow out of seeds already in the ground. Two things are lacking, water and mankind. The time is therefore between the third and the sixth days of Creation. God then continues by providing water and by creating Man, so that the requirements for planting of the Garden of Eden (not the creation of the plants) are fulfilled:

“Then the water table rose and watered the whole surface of the ground. (7) And the Lord God formed Man, (from the) dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and so the man became a living soul. (8) And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and put the man which He had made into it” (Gen. 2:6–8, Author’s translation).

It becomes clear in the following text, that the narrator is describing the growth, planting and cultivation of the ground, not the actual creation of plantlife.

“And the Lord God caused all sorts of trees to grow out of the ground ... (10) And a river came out of Eden, to water the garden ... (15) And the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden, to tend it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:9, 10, 15, Author’s translation).

C. The supposedly contradictory verses Genesis 2:18–19

The following text contains another problematic passage:

“And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable (or appropriate) to him.’ (19) And the Lord God brought all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air, which He had made out of earth, to the man, in order to see what He would call them.” (Genesis 2:18–19, Author’s translation).

This text narrates in detail the creation of the woman from the man, while Genesis 1 only sketches the creation of mankind (vs. 27). A problem exists only if one interprets the conjunction in Genesis 2:19 as an indication of a chronological order. “And God formed every beast ... and brought them to the man ...” This would mean that mankind had been created before the animals.

Carl Friedrich Keil⁹ and Samuel R. Külling give serious arguments from Middle Eastern literature in favor of the first translation, which would indicate that God brought Man animals which He had already created. Keil notes, since only the “beasts of the field” and the “birds of the air” are mentioned, the creatures indicated are domestic animals. This would correspond to the introduction of the cultivated plants in Genesis 2:5ff.

If we assume that the account given in Genesis 2 presupposes the one in Genesis 1, we can see that there are no contradictions between them. Whoever, of course, takes it for granted that the two chapters contradict each other, will continue to maintain his position on the basis of the grammatical uncertainty.

In conclusion, we agree with the Old Testament expert, Gustav Freidrich Oehler:

“The contents of Genesis 2:4ff, the introduction to human history, is not a second account of Creation, but rather a supplement of the first and describes

*the completion of the earth in order to provide mankind with a home, a sphere of activity and a place for the revelation of God.*¹⁰

2 The Origin of Genesis¹¹

The origin of the Pentateuch has been disputed for the last four hundred years¹². The so-called ‘historical-critical’ method has committed itself to the opinion that the material contained in the five books was collected out of various ancient sources and assembled by several generations of editors. Too many of these theories, however, contradict each other much too often.

Conservative¹³ and Fundamentalist¹⁴ students emphasize that such a pieced-together work would be unique in the context of ancient Middle Eastern literature. Most of them, particularly the Fundamentalists, suggest as an alternative the authorship of Moses, which the Pentateuch itself, as well as the New Testament, confirms.¹⁵ This is not as easy to prove for Genesis, however, for it does not mention Moses, who could not have been a witness to its events, as he was in the other four books (except Deut. 34:1–12).

It is often assumed that Moses was transmitting a ‘backwards prophecy’. Such an interpretation should not be rejected out of hand, but it does seem to be a last-ditch attempt to explain the phenomenon of Genesis. Beginning with the Fundamentalist position, I would like to try to present a model

for a ‘natural’ origin for Genesis, by using the text of the book itself and contemporary knowledge about ancient Middle Eastern literature, without, however, explaining away Genesis’ divine inspiration.

Paul J. Wiseman, an archaeologist at the British Museum in London, presented this model for the first time in 1936.¹⁶ He was a conservative Christian, but did not attempt to refute Biblical Criticism, which he used himself¹⁷. Meanwhile, his theory has been disseminated widely, not only in new editions of his own work, but also in various text books and in theological journals.¹⁸ The following study will filter the slack out of his material and present the relevant conclusions.

First, it is important to note that alphabets and writing are older than often supposed. According to the evolutionist interpretation of history, the alphabet must have developed over thousands of years. Earlier historians believed that Moses and his contemporaries had not yet known how to write. We know, however, that mankind developed a very complicated alphabet very early in his history. The ancient Middle East produced such a wealth of material that hundreds of researchers are presently involved in reading and evaluating it. Should our model fit the facts, it is then clear that mankind has been able to write ever since his creation, or at least shortly afterwards, just as he was always, according to Scripture, able to speak.

The ancient Middle Eastern scribes wrote on clay tablets and employed many literary conventions, which Wiseman and others have investigated closely. Wiseman discovered certain rules in the collection and arrangement of texts:

1. The tablets were collected in chronological order, (in family chronicles, for example) and sorted, with key words at the beginning and the end of each tablet.
2. Title, author, date and location stood at the end of the text, not at the beginning.
3. Family chronicles, mostly of the royal families, were continued by the successor or the descendant, who took over and added to the narrative.¹⁹

The ‘toledoth’ of Genesis

The Hebrew expression, ‘*toledoth*’ occurs eleven times in Genesis. It means “This is the history, or chronicle of”²⁰. The formula apparently structures the whole narrative. Wiseman assumes that the *toledoth* ended each tablet, as he found key words, location and time close to it, material which he believed to

be unnecessary in the text itself, unless for literary reasons. (See below).

Let us take a look at the individual cases, which we will then evaluate, starting with the end and working backwards.

Comments on the following outline: The story of Joseph (Gen. 37:2b–50), according to Wiseman, contains not Babylonian words, as does the section before it, but Egyptian ones. Its conclusion is also different. Perhaps it was collected by Moses, in order to create a transition to the events which he had witnessed. Joshua then added Moses’ death and continued the account, which had become the chronicle of the people of Israel. His death was then recorded by another (Joshua 24:29–33), and the history of Israel was then further recorded by other writers.

Tablet XI, written by Jacob (“This is the history of Jacob”), supplements Esau’s Tablet X and Tablet IX, which describes Isaac’s life and was written by both brothers. The description of location and the time is obvious.

Usually the oldest son wrote the continuation of the family chronicle, which

The Tablets and the Family Chronicles of Genesis

Tablet I: 1:1–2:4a		
Title	2:4a	“This is the history of the heavens and the earth”
Date	2:4a	“when they were created”
Key Word	1:1	“God created” = 2:3

Tablet II: 2:4b–5:1a		
Title	5:1a	“This is the book of the history of Adam”
Date	4:26	“Then men began to call on the name of the LORD”
Key Word	2:3	“God created” = 2,4a
	2:4	“In the day that God created” = 5:1
Note		Adam was a witness to the planting of the Garden of Eden, the creation of the woman, the Fall (literal quotes!), and the murder of Abel. He knew Cain’s descendants. (4:17–22)
Tablet III: 5:1b–6:9a		
Title	6:9a	“This is the history of Noah”
Date	5:32	“And Noah was 500 years old” (hardly his age at the birth of his sons).
Key Word	5:32	“Shem, Ham and Japheth” = 6:10
Note		Noah recorded his account before the Flood and took the tablets with him into the Ark. Noah recorded his account before the Flood and took the tablets with him into the Ark.
Tablet IV: 6:9b–10:1a		
Title	10:1	“This is the history of the sons of Noah”
Date	9:29	Noah dies at the age of 950.
Key Word	6:11-13	= 6:5–7
Note		Is this a combination of 3 separate accounts or a single one? The individual days were recorded by witnesses.
Tablet V: 10:1b–11:10a		
Title	11:10a	“This is the history of Shem”
Date	11:9	After the desertion of the Tower of Babel
Key Word	10:1	“After the flood” = 10:32
	10:32	The nations scatter over the face of the earth. = 11:9
	10:31	“in their nations” = 10:32
Note		Shem added the confusion of language to the account.

Tablet VI: 11:10b–11:27a		
Title	11:27	“This is the history of Terah”
Date	11:26	“Now Terah was 70 years” (hardly his age at the birth of his sons. Compare 5:32).
Key Word	11:26	“Abram, Nahor and Haran” = 11:27
Note		Terah repeated and continued the account (11:21ff). His father either died at the age of 69, which would fit, or at the age of 119, which would be too late, but is the better documented reading. This is problematic for the model.
Tablet VII: 11:27b–25:12a		
Title	25:12a	“This is the history of Ishmael”
Date	25:12a	“And Isaac dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi”
Key Word	25:11	“Abraham’s son” = 25:19
Note		Ishmael (and Isaac?) wrote about Abraham. They buried him together. = 25:9
Tablet VIII: 25:12b–25:19a		
Title	25:19a	“This is the history of Isaac”
Date	25:18	Ishmael’s descendants lived “from Havila as far as Shur”
	25:17	After Ishmael’s death
Key Word	25:19	“his sons” = 25:12
Note		Isaac added the death of his older brother.
Tablet IX: 25:19b-36:1		
Title	36:1	“This is the history of Esau”
Date	35:29	The death of Isaac
Key Word	35:29	“His sons buried him” = 25:9
Note		Accounts which include both Jacob and Esau: Chapter 33 and 35:29
Tablet X: 36:2–36:9		
Title	36:9	“This is the history of Edom”
Date	36:8	“Esau dwelt in Mount Seir”

Key Word	36:1	Esau is Edom = 36:8
	36:9	“The father of the Edomites”
Note		This part was written by Esau after leaving Jacob. It names his new home.
Tablet XI: 36:10–37:2a		
Title	37:2a	“This is the history of Jacob”
Date	37:1	“And Jacob dwelt in ... Canaan”
Key Word	36:9	“The father of the Edomites”
Note		Jacob added his brother’s history. Compare Tablet VIII.

was then taken over by the second son, so that the the responsibility for the Genesis account reverts twice to the line of salvation history (Heilsgeschichte). This also occurs in Tablets VII and VIII. Ishmael took over the responsibility for the chronicle directly from his grandfather, Terah. Terah’s account poses a problem for our model. If his father died at 119, the better documented reading, he died too late to appear in the account. The age of 69 for his death would fit better. Genesis 11:26 is interesting. The report of Terah’s age, 70 years old, can hardly be his age at the birth of his sons, for they would then be triplets. It is mathematically impossible, as well, as Genesis 5:32 demonstrates. According to our model, the text indicates the time at which the chronicle was passed on to the next generation.

In Tablet V, Shem adds the account of the three books (Tablet IV). Tablets III and IV contains the history of the Flood. Noah recorded his account before entering the Ark and passed it

on to his sons, who witnessed the Flood themselves. This explains not only the wealth of details and the exact recording of the days, but also the source of all of the written accounts of the Creation and of the Flood. Noah and his sons passed their accounts on to their children, who later became the ancestors of the nations, who corrupted reports they had received. In Genesis 5:32, we again find a inexplicable notation of age. As with Terah, 500 years can hardly be Noah’s age at the birth of his sons, but it could indicate the date of the tablet, shortly before the Flood, when the sons already had families of their own.

Tablet II is also most interesting, as it deviates from the usual pattern, “This is the book of the history of Adam”! It is clear that the *toledoth* formula is a literary method of indicating the transmission of a tradition. Adam wrote a “book”, in which he recorded the facts of the Creation which he had witnessed: the planting of the Garden of Eden, the creation of Eve, the Fall and the history

of his oldest children, as far as he experienced it.

If Tablet II is difficult, Tablet I is explosive. If our model is accurate, the first tablet should be dated “the day of the creation of the heavens and the earth”. Who, besides God Himself, could have recorded this account? Note that the text names no author, in spite of the definite date. Did God give Adam a written account of the Creation, which included all the facts which Adam had not witnessed?

This is, of course, only a model. It explains many of the details of the texts and their circumstances, but its greatest problem is the question whether the

toledoth formula belongs to the previous text (according to our model) or to the following one (the theory of most interpretations). It is also possible that Moses modified some aspects, as the description of some locations would seem to indicate. In any case, the model demonstrates that there are indeed scientifically credible alternatives to contemporary theories of multiple sources for Genesis, and that Fundamentalists need not sacrifice their belief in the infallibility of Scripture to scientific research.

Annotation Anmerkungen

¹Reprinted from “Is There a Contradiction between the Two Creation Accounts?”. *Christianity and Society* 7 (1997) 2: 16–17

²See Samuel R. Külling. *Zur Datierung der Genesis-P-Stücke*. Kok, (Kampen, 1964), Immanuel Verlag (FETA); (Riehen, Basel, 1987); R. K. Harrison. *Introduction to the New Testament*, IVP, (London, 1969), pp. 493–662; Gleason Archer., *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* Vol 1, Verlag der Liebenzeller Mission, (Bad Liebenzell, 1987), pp. 97–227 (Engl. A Survey of Old Testament Introduction); Raymond B. Dillard, Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Zondervan, (Grand Rapids, 1994), pp. 38–48.

³See verses 5, 7–8, 15–16, 21–22. The name ‘Yahwe’ does not appear alone until Gen. 4:1.

⁴Donovan Courville. *The Exodus Problem and its Ramifications*, Challenge Books, (Looma Linda, Cal., 1971).

⁵Samuel R. Külling. “Sind Genesis 1,1–2,4a und Genesis 2,4b ff zwei verschiedene, widersprüchliche Schöpfungsberichte?”, *Bibel und Gemeinde* 76 (1976), pp. 217–220: „Der Schöpfungsbericht und naturwissenschaftliche Fragen“, ob. cit., „Das Verständnis von Gen 2,4ff. und sein Verhältnis zu Gen 1,1–2,3; Genesis 13. Teil“, *Fundamentum* 4/1983, pp. 4–16.

⁶See Thomas Schirrmacher. “Die Entstehung der Genesis”, *Factum* 5, 1985, pp. 12–15 (English version reprinted as next chapter of this book).

⁷See Samuel R. Külling’s three articles above for detailed arguments against taking the two statements together.

⁸ Hebrew uses the same word for 'ground' and 'the earth'

⁹ Carl Friedrich Keil. "Genesis und Exodus", *Biblischer Kommentar über das Alte Testament* 1/1, (1878; reprint, Giessen, Brunnen Verlag, 1983).

¹⁰ Gustav Friedrich Oehler. *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, J. F. Steinkopf, (Stuttgart, 1891), p. 74.

¹¹ Reprinted from "The Origin of Genesis". *Christianity and Society* 7 (1997) 4: 15–17

¹² See Samuel R. Külling. *Zur Datierung der Genesis-P-Stücke*, pp. 5–130; Samuel R. Külling. *Was lehren uns 250 Jahre Quellenforschung*, (FETA: Basel), 1961, pp. 1–10 (Fundamental interpretation); Raymond B. Dillard, Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Zondervan, (Grand Rapids, 1994), pp. 38–48.; Hans Joachim Krau. "Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments", Neukirchener Verlag, (Neukirchen, 1982) (historical-critical view), as well as current introductions to the Pentateuch.

¹³ B. Kenneth A. Kitchen. *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, Brockhaus, (Wuppertal, 1965); Kenneth A. Kitchen. *The Bible in its World*, Paternoster, (Exeter, 1977), A. R. Millard. *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, InterVarsity Press, (Leicester, GB, 1980).

¹⁴ See Samuel R. Külling. *Zur Datierung der Genesis-P-Stücke*, op. cit.; Josh McDowell. *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Campus Crusade for Christ, (San Bernardino, 1975); Wilhelm Möller. *Grundriß für alttestamentliche Einleitung*, Evangelischer Verlag, (Berlin, 1958); Wilhelm Möller. *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, (Zwickau, 1934); Gleason Archer. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Moody, (Chicago, 1974); Edward J. Young. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, (Grand Rapids, 1964).

¹⁵ See the works above. The opinion of the New Testament is particularly important for Fundamentalists, because it represents a divinely inspired interpretation. Others believe that Jesus and the New Testament writers only repeat the views typical of their time. Is this opinion not

too simple? Is the opinion of Jesus' contemporaries not of great historical significance?!

¹⁶ Paul J. Wiseman. *New Discoveries in Babylonia about Genesis*, 1936, (reprint: Paul J. Wiseman, *Clues to Creation*, compiled by D. J. Wiseman, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, (London, 1977).

¹⁷ Not in the work cited above, but in the second part of the compilation by D. J. Wiseman, he supports the theory of theistic evolution and the theory of the 'Days of Revelation' (= the six days of creation are days of revelation of what came into existence during a long time), as well as other historical-critical views.

¹⁸ Not only in the work mentioned above, but in others, as well. In the second part of the new edition, he represents the theistic view and the 'Day of Revelation' theory, along with other historical-critical interpretations.

¹⁹ This principle, which can be observed in the whole Old Testament, refutes the usual argument against Moses' or Joshua's authorship, that they could not have reported their own deaths.

²⁰ Samuel Külling, op. cit., pp. 216–225. By using the formula to clarify Genesis' structure, Külling demonstrates how the *toledoth* formula refutes the theory of multiple sources for the book.

The Author

Über den Autor



Thomas Schirrmacher (*1960) earned four doctorates in Theology (Dr. theol., 1985, Netherlands), in Cultural Anthropology (PhD, 1989, USA), in Ethics (ThD, 1996, USA), and in Sociology of Religions (Dr. phil., 2007, Germany) and received two honorary doctorates in Theology (DD, 1997, USA) and International Development (DD, 2006, India). He is professor of ethics and world missions, as well as professor of the sociology of religion and of international development in Germany, Romania, USA and India, and is president of Martin Bucer Theological Seminary with 11 small campuses in Europe (including Turkey). As an international human rights expert he is board member of the International Society for Human Rights, spokesman for human rights of the World Evangelical Association and director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom. He is also president of Gebende Hände gGmbH (Giving Hands), an internationally active relief organisation. He has authored and edited 74 books, which have been translated into 14 languages. Thomas is married to Christine, a professor of Islamic Studies, and father of a boy and a girl.

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