

February 2009

Frank W. Nelte

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN 'CREATE' AND 'MAKE' IN GENESIS 1

Many people tend to view the verb "to make" as a synonym for the verb "to create". And in our English dictionary definitions these two verbs certainly do overlap to a considerable degree. In the Genesis account both these verbs are used. But while the meanings of the two Hebrew verbs involved here appear to many people to sometimes be synonymous, God very clearly did not intend these words to be viewed as synonyms in the context of Genesis 1. This becomes clear from a closer examination of the whole account.

Let's examine the relevant words in this chapter.

THE HEBREW VERBS FOR "CREATE" AND FOR "MAKE"

The Hebrew verb translated as "**create**" is "**bara**". It is used three times in chapter 1, in verses 1, 21 and 27. Here are the statements that use this verb:

GENESIS 1:1 = God **CREATED** the heavens and the earth.

GENESIS 1:21 = God **CREATED** all water creatures and all birds.

GENESIS 1:27 = God **CREATED** human beings.

The Hebrew verb translated as "**made**" is "**asah**". This verb is used seven times in chapter 1, in verses 7, 11, 12, 16, 25, 26 and 31. Here are the statements that use this verb:

GENESIS 1:7 = God **MADE** the sky, the atmosphere.

GENESIS 1:11 = fruit trees are to **MAKE** ("yielding") fruit after their kind.

GENESIS 1:12 = and so fruit trees **MADE** ("yielding") fruit.

GENESIS 1:16 = God **MADE** two great lights.

GENESIS 1:25 = God **MADE** land animals after their kind.

GENESIS 1:26 = God said, let us **MAKE** man.

GENESIS 1:31 = God saw everything that He had **MADE**.

There are three things to take note of in these seven verses.

First of all, in verses 11 and 12 the Hebrew "asah" is somewhat disguised by being translated as "yielding". These verses in fact contain two totally different and unrelated Hebrew verbs in each verse, which are unfortunately both translated into English in the KJV as "yielding". Here is the text of verse 11 with the relevant Hebrew words inserted into the text. (The same two words apply to verse 12.)

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb **yielding** (Hebrew "**zara**") seed, *and* the fruit tree **yielding** (Hebrew "**asah**") fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

The clearer correct translation here should read: "God said, let ... the fruit tree MAKE fruit after his kind", since every other occurrence of "asah" in this chapter is also translated as "made".

[COMMENT: Here we need not concern ourselves with the meaning of "zara".]

To make this quite clear: The translation "the fruit tree YIELDING fruit after his kind" conveys the correct meaning of the Hebrew text here. So in that sense this translation is not incorrect. The problem is that, in not showing the English language reader that this is simply the identical word elsewhere in the same context translated as "made", it helps to HIDE the correct meaning of this Hebrew verb for "made" ("asah").

Verses 11-12 show that "make" is the appropriate verb to describe the biological process by which fruit trees produce fruits. Specifically, that process does NOT merit the verb "create". Fruit trees do not "create" fruit. And this use of "asah" in verses 11-12 helps to clarify the meaning of "asah" in the other verses of this chapter.

The second thing to take note of is that the use of the verb "made" in Genesis 1:31 seems to show that this verb may sometimes be used in a general way to include the meaning of "create", though three verses later, in Genesis 2:3 the two verbs are both used together, to show that their meanings actually differ. Here is Genesis 2:3.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God **created** and **made**.

We can express the differences between these two Hebrew verbs as follows:

1) The Hebrew word for "**create**" implies bringing something new into existence by using only the Holy Spirit (the power of God) to do the creating.

2) The Hebrew word for "**make**" generally implies bringing something new into existence by working with, or making use of some things that were created previously. In other words, "making" generally presupposes that something used in the making process is already in existence before the new thing is "made".

This meaning of "make" would be easier to recognize if here in verses 11-12 "asah" had been translated as "making" rather than as "yielding", because such a translation would CLEARLY LINK IT TO THE OTHER VERSES WHERE THE VERB "MAKE" IS ALSO USED.

The third thing to note is that we will later examine the use of the verb "make" in verse 26 ("let Us MAKE man"). There is a simple explanation for the use of "make" in this verse.

Before we analyze the above information, we should also consider all the "let ..." statements made by God in this chapter, since a "let ..." statement by God can easily obviate the need for either the verb "create" or the verb "make". God speaking a command can have both of these effects, to create or to make.

GOD'S "LET ..." STATEMENTS IN GENESIS 1

There are 11 statements in ten verses by God, which are introduced by the word "let". They are found in verses 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 15, 20, 22, 24 and 26. Here are these statements:

GENESIS 1:3 = LET there be light. This is not a reference to the creation of light, since God has always been surrounded by light, and also the sun had already been created in verse 1. It is only a reference to allowing the penetration of some light through the mists and vapors that had enveloped the earth after Satan's rebellion.

GENESIS 1:6 = LET there be a sky. This is also not a reference to the creation (or the bringing into existence) of the sky. It simply refers to God's actions of cleaning up the lower atmosphere that already existed (ever since verse 1), and which had been polluted with thick fumes and smoke during Satan's rebellion.

GENESIS 1:9 = LET the waters under the heavens be gathered together. This is also not a reference to the creation of the waters. It refers to the waters that already existed being gathered together.

GENESIS 1:11 = LET the earth bring forth grass. This is a reference to the creation of plant life (flora) with the ability to reproduce, and to produce fruits and seeds. This is the first "let" statement thus far that involved actual creating. But notice that this creating is achieved by USING something that already existed, the soil. It was the soil that God commanded to bring forth plants and vegetation.

GENESIS 1:14 = LET there be lights in the sky. This is also not a reference to the creation of those lights (they had already been created in verse 1). This simply refers to God's actions of clearing the atmosphere to such a degree that the sun and the moon and stars became visible for the first time (since the conditions of verse 2 had come about) from a location here on earth.

GENESIS 1:15 = LET them be for lights in the sky of the heavens. This is likewise not a reference to the creation of these lights, but only God's statement identifying the designated purposes for these lights.

GENESIS 1:20 = LET the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature. This is a reference to the creation of all life forms in the waters and also to all birds. This is the second "let" statement that involved actual creating. But notice that again this creating is achieved by USING something that already existed, the waters. It was the waters that God commanded to bring forth the aquatic life forms.

GENESIS 1:22 = LET fowl multiply in the earth. This statement is clearly after the birds have already been created in the previous verse. So this "let" statement does not refer to any creating; it only refers to reproduction.

GENESIS 1:24 = LET the earth bring forth the living creature. This is a reference to the creation of all land animals. It is the third "let" statement that involves actual creating. And again this creating is achieved by USING something that already existed, the earth. In the same way that God had commanded the earth in verse 11 to bring forth vegetation, so now God commanded the earth to bring forth all land animals.

GENESIS 1:26 = LET Us make man in our image ... and LET them have dominion. These two are the last "let" statements in this chapter, and they are not strictly a description of the actual creation of mankind, though it may appear to be such. Let's notice the following things about this verse.

First of all, verse 26 contains the only "let" statement that also includes the verb "make". None of the other "let" statements contain either the verb "make" or the verb "create".

Now we have already seen that in verse 27 it says that God CREATED man. So WHY does it here in

verse 26 say "let Us MAKE man"? Doesn't this show that "make" and "create" really are synonyms? No, it does not.

First of all, the statement "let Us make man" is not a description of the actual creation of man. Verse 26 is really only an expression of intent! That's all! Likewise, the statement "let them have dominion" is also only an expression of intent. And the first expression of intent in this verse uses the verb "make" precisely because God was intending to MAKE the form of a man out of soil (and the form of a woman out of a man's rib). This "MAKING" did not involve creating; God used the soil He had created previously to make that lifeless human model. Once that form (that lifeless model) had been formed, THEN God created a man by breathing life into his nostrils.

So verse 26 presents an expression of intent to make something, and verse 27 is a summary statement about the creation of mankind. But this does not mean that the verb "make" in verse 26 has the same meaning as the verb "create" in verse 27. It does not have the same meaning! And we should be able to see the distinction between these two verbs, and we should see the intended meaning of these two verses.

To summarize the ten verses with "let" statements in chapter 1: three refer to something being created, one verse is an expression of intent to do something, and the other six refer to God doing something with things He had created before He made these "let" statements. These "let" statements show that we can have references to things being CREATED even without the verb "create" being used; and we can also have references to things being MADE without the verb "make" being used. In each case it is the context of these "let" statements that shows whether "creating" or "making" is involved, or whether it is only an expression of intent.

Now that we have looked at all the verses in this chapter that speak about "creating" and "making" and "letting", let's put all of these verses together. Here is what we have.

COMBINING ALL THESE STATEMENTS

Here is the sequence of thoughts presented by all these particular statements.

Verse 1 = God CREATED the entire universe, including this planet earth.

Verse 3 = God ENABLED some of the sun's light to penetrate through the clouds.

Verse 6 = God MADE the sky to be between the waters below and the clouds above, by clearing the lower atmosphere.

Verse 7 = Same point as verse 6.

Verse 9 = God CAUSED the waters to gather into one big ocean.

Verse 11 = God CREATED all the plants, and plants are to MAKE fruits and seeds.

Verse 12 = Same point as verse 11.

Verse 14 = God further CLEARED the upper atmosphere, to make the sun and the moon visible from a place on the earth.

Verse 15 = God DESIGNATED specific functions for the sun and the moon.

Verse 16 = Same point as verse 15.

Verse 17 = God CORRECTED the orbits of the sun and the moon to perfect cycles.

Verse 20 = God CREATED all aquatic creatures and all birds.

Verse 21 = Same point as verse 20.

Verse 22 = God COMMANDED these life forms to multiply (parallel to verse 11).

Verse 24 = God CREATED all the land animals.

Verse 25 = Same point as verse 24. Though the word "created" could have been used here (as it is in verse 21), this verse uses the word "made". I suspect that this is because the previous verse has already covered the creation of these animals, and because God used "the earth" in this process.

Verse 26 = God EXPRESSED HIS INTENTION to MAKE the human form.

Verse 27 = God CREATED human beings.

Verse 31 = God VIEWED everything He had MADE (this must include the things He had CREATED). I suspect that instead of the longer statement "God saw everything that He had created and made" (as found in essence in Genesis 2:3), this verse has simply presented this in the shortened form "God saw everything that He had made", with the clear understanding that this is to mean "everything He had CREATED AND MADE". The statement three verses later leads me to suspect this.

Genesis 2:3 = God's work had consisted of both, creating and making things.

We have now examined all the statements in Genesis 1 that discuss creating and making. It should be clear that God did not intend for these two words to have identical meanings. Understanding the difference between these two verbs should help us to understand what really happened back in Genesis chapter 1. People (e.g. worldly scholars) who blur the distinction between the two Hebrew verbs that are used in this account are also likely to not really understand the information in this chapter. Specifically, such scholars frequently fail to understand that verse 16 is not intended to be a discussion of the "creation" of the sun and the moon.

When we read Genesis 1 we should never confuse "make" with "create". And we should keep in mind that verse 31 is in all likelihood a deliberately contracted statement.

Frank W. Nelte