

# Book of Moses Essays #53: Moses Sees the Garden of Eden (Moses 3) “Is the transition between Moses 2 and 3 a clumsy stitch or a skillful shift?(Moses 3:4–5)

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Figure 1. Grant Romney Clawson (1927–2016): *The Garden of Eden*

In this *Essay*, we explore what is often considered to be the opening of a “second” Creation account in Genesis and the Book of Moses (Moses 3:4–5). Modern scholars have written at length about differences between the accounts that seem to point to the joining of multiple ancient sources. However, identifying and teasing out multiple hypothetical sources behind Genesis is only one aspect of the problem of understanding this marvelous work of scripture: not only do we need to *sort out the sources*, we also need to know how to *take in the texts* — in other words, to better understand *why* the sources might have been put together in their current form. Below, we will describe four different perspectives on this question.

## 1. Seeing the Transition as a Narrative Seam Between Different Biblical Sources

Bible readers have long wondered why there are two creation narratives in Genesis — the first in Genesis 1 and the second beginning in Genesis 2. The two accounts differ in perspective, focus, vocabulary, style, and use of the divine name (i.e., God vs. Lord God). Repetitions and seeming contradictions are also apparent. These observations are long-recognized issues in biblical scholarship and can be seen as providing support for the idea

that the book of Genesis was compiled from multiple, overlapping sources.<sup>[1]</sup> Although scholars differ on the details of what is commonly called the Documentary Hypothesis,<sup>2</sup> they are nearly all in agreement that the book of Genesis as we have it was put together at a much later time than Moses could have lived. Richard Friedman has been among the most successful authors to date in explaining these complex ideas to non-specialists.<sup>3]</sup>

## **2. Seeing the Transition as Providing a Richer Conception of Creation**

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However, even those who find the Documentary Hypothesis compelling have good reason to admire the resulting literary product on its own terms. For example, in the case of the two Creation chapters, Friedman himself writes that in the scriptural version of Genesis we have a text “that is greater than the sum of its parts. ... [T]he combination of the from-the-sky-down and the from-the-earth-up accounts produces a much richer and much more whole conception of Creation than we would have if there were only one account. Also, placing the cosmic conception first creates the impression of the wide camera view narrowing in. This feeling of narrowing in ... continue[s] through the [later] stories, contributing to the rich-in-background feeling.”<sup>[4]</sup>

## **3. Seeing the Transition as a Prelude to the Story of How Evil Entered a Perfect Creation**

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A central point made obvious by the juxtaposition of the two Creation narratives is that, “in contrast to Mesopotamian thought, ... the emergence of evil [on earth] is subsequent to Creation and not part of the creative process itself. ... What the ... author [of the second account] sets out to explain, using familiar mythic *topoi* in the manner of the sages, is how evil could be generated in a Creation declared (seven times) to be good. In this sense, therefore, one may say that the [second] narrative contains the reflection generated by the [first] Creation recital.”<sup>[5]</sup> Taken together, the accounts preserved in Moses 2-4 describe the transition of Adam and Eve from a divinely established state of order and sovereignty to a world of inevitable decay and unrighteous dominion.<sup>[6]</sup>

## **4. Seeing the Transition as a Purposive Shift in a Dramatic Presentation of a Temple Text**

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Richard Friedman’s observation that the transition from a top-down “wide camera view” of Creation to a “narrowing in” to a detailed story of the creation given from a more personal perspective is significant to those who believe that Genesis and Moses may contain echoes of an ancient temple text.<sup>[7]</sup> Though sometimes the joining of these two separate Creation accounts is seen as little more than a clumsily exposed stitch in a narrative seam, there may be more editorial subtlety and skill shown in the way they were put together than what is immediately apparent.

Hugh Nibley explained the apparent discontinuity between the two Creation accounts as a purposive shift, seeing the interlude that separates the stories in verses 3-7 as stage directions composed to accompany a drama that was part of ancient temple ritual.<sup>[8]</sup> As the curtain closes on the drama's prologue outlining the seven days of Creation, the narrator pauses to explain that all things were created spiritually prior to their natural appearance on the earth.<sup>9</sup> Following this interlude, the curtain reopens for a change of scene in the second part of the creation drama: we are now viewing the details of the story of the creation of man not from the vantage point of heaven, but instead as it is seen from the Garden.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Conclusion

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So, which of these four perspectives is most correct? In actuality, there is no compelling reason why any of them must be rejected outright. Indeed, the genius of the introduction to the story of the Fall is that it brilliantly serves multiple purposes at the same time. Whether we experience this passage as readers or instead as participants in a temple drama, our hearts and minds are prepared by a thoughtful appreciation of these transition verses for the extensive and indispensable description of the Garden of Eden that follows in Moses 3 and for the dramatic scenes of the Fall that lie ahead in Moses 4.

Adapted from Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. *Creation, Fall, and the Story of Adam and Eve*. 2014 Updated ed. In *God's Image and Likeness* 1. Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2014. <https://archive.org/details/140123IGIL12014ReadingS>, pp. 133-134, 153-154.

## Further Reading

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## Notes for Figures

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Figure 1. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media/image/garden-of-eden-clawson-art-6232196?lang=eng> (accessed 8 November 2020). Use for personal and noncommercial purposes authorized.

## Endnotes

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[1] John Sailhamer aptly summarizes the situation when he writes (J. H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, p. 5):

Genesis is characterized by both an easily discernible unity and a noticeable lack of uniformity. ... The unity of the Book of Genesis... should be seen in its compositional strategy as a whole rather than in an absolutely smooth and uniform narrative. ... The picture of the narratives of Genesis that emerges ... is that of a carefully wrought account of Israel's history fashioned from the narratives and genealogical tables of Israel's own ancestral archives.

Such an idea should not be foreign to readers of the Book of Mormon, where inspired editors have explicitly revealed their weaving of separate overlapping records into the finished scriptural narrative (K. P. Jackson, *Genesis*, pp 58-61). In contrast to the carefully controlled prophetic redaction of the Book of Mormon, however, we do not know how much of the subsequent editing of the Old Testament may have taken place “with less inspiration and authority” (ibid., p. 63).

For a summary of Jewish sources documenting the idea that Moses used previously extant records in composing Genesis, see A. J. Heschel, *Heavenly Torah*, pp. 650-653.

[2] Scholarly conversation on the Documentary Hypothesis and other important issues in Higher Criticism is, of course, ongoing. Although broad agreement persists on many issues, the state of research on the composition of the Pentateuch continues to evolve in important ways. In 2012, Konrad Schmid gave the following assessment (K. Schmid, *Genesis*, pp. 28-29):

Pentateuchal scholarship has changed dramatically in the last three decades, at least when seen in a global perspective. The confidence of earlier assumptions about the formation of the Pentateuch no longer exists, a situation that might be lamented but that also opens up new and—at least in the view of some scholars—potentially more adequate paths to understand its composition. One of the main results of the new situation is that neither traditional nor newer theories can be taken as the accepted starting point of analysis; rather, they are, at most, possible ends.

That said, there is little doubt that the basic ideas of source criticism behind the Documentary Hypothesis are here to stay. Cf. D. M. Carr, *Formation*, pp. 102–125.

[3] R. E. Friedman, *Who*; R. E. Friedman, *Hidden*; R. E. Friedman, *Sources*.

[4] R. E. Friedman, *Commentary*, p. 16; cf. T. L. Brodie, *Dialogue*, pp. 123-132. Apart from source considerations, arguments from literary analysis have been made to explain the seeming duplication and reversal of Creation events in Moses 3. For example, James Faulconer concludes (J. E. Faulconer, *Adam and Eve*, p. 3):

There may be contradictions within the text, but the more obvious those contradictions are, the less likely it is that they are contradictions that undo the text. It is too much to assume that the redaction of Genesis was a product of blindness. A considerable amount of “cut and paste” work was surely involved in the creation of the Genesis story, but unless we can come to no other reasonable conclusion, we should assume that the text is cut and pasted in this way rather than some other for a reason. Thus, it would be a mistake to think that the elements of the narrative merely contradict each other. The story we have before us is one text that calls to be read as such.

For more detailed analyses of literary arguments for the unity of the final form of the records that make up the book of Genesis, see U. Cassuto, *Documentary*; U. Cassuto, *Adam to Noah*, pp. 84-94; I. M. Kikawada et al., *Before Abraham*.

[5] J. Blenkinsopp, *P and J*, p. 7.

[6] K. Burke, *Governance*, p. 17.

[7] For an extensive discussion of the Book of Moses as a temple text, see J. M. Bradshaw, *LDS Book of Enoch*.

[8] H. W. Nibley, *Myths*, p. 42; cf. H. W. Nibley, *Drama*, p. 36.

[9] Genesis 2:4-5; Moses 3:4-5.

[10] H. W. Nibley, *Message* (2005), p. 284; H. W. Nibley, *Before Adam*, p. 72. Bible scholar Nahum Sarna comments (N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 16): “This change in perspective is signaled by the inversion [in Genesis and Abraham (though not in Moses)] of the regular sequence “heaven and earth” in the opening sentence. The almost unique expression ‘earth and heaven’ suggests pride of place [in the account that follows] for terrestrial affairs.”