

Shemita Cycle and Creation

By

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'For six years you shall plow your fields, but the seventh year you shall be holy to YHWH, in that year you shall do no work.' **Lev.25:3-4**

Jer 4:23-27 *I looked on the earth, and, behold! It was without form and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and, behold! They quaked, and all the hills were shaken. I looked, and, behold! There was no man, and all the birds of the skies had fled. I looked, and, behold! The fruitful place was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down before the face of YHWH, before His glowing anger. For so YHWH has said, The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.*

One of the most unfamiliar teachings among the Nazarenes is the principle of the *Shemita* (pl. *Shemitot*), or the cosmic Sabbatical eras of the pre-Adamic (before Adam) creation. According the ancient Jewish sages Adam was not the first human to have been on the earth and there were full civilizations that had risen up and had been destroyed. This concept can be found in the Oral Traditions of Judaism, but only hinted at in the Scriptures.¹

According to **Bereshith 1:1-2**, *In Beginning he created Elohim the heavens and the earth, and the earth she was² formless and empty...*

- *"The earth was without form and void, desolate of people and empty of all animals."* **Targum Pseudo Jonathan :Genesis**
- **Nachmanides**: *The answer is that the process of creation is a deep mystery not to be understood from the verses, and it cannot truly be known except through the tradition going back to Moses, our teacher, who received it from the mouth of the Almighty, and those who know it are obligated to conceal it.*
- **Ibn Ezra Vayikra 25:2** *Discussing Shemita, and the idea of sabbatical cycles, he says: A secret about the age of the universe is alluded to here*

¹ Job 38:4-7 makes it clear the heavens were created first else the stars could not rejoice when the earth was created. This proves that v.1 of genesis refers to prior creations and that the earth had been under some kind of judgment that made it empty. Also, in Genesis 1:16 the lights were made not created, so their actual creation had to be prior to their making. Notice the earth and the heavens were created in verse one of Genesis but recreated on days 3 and 4, as they were there in the very beginning of creation.

² The word "was" in verse 2 of Genesis is from the verb "to become", not the verb "to be", which proves that the earth became a wasteland and empty since its creation in verse 1. The KEY to understanding this apparently complex problem lies in the little word "was." It can also be translated "BECAME." In fact, in Genesis 19:16 it is translated "became." We read: "And Lot's wife became a pillar of salt."

The ancient sages of Yisrael noted that Yeshayahu sated in **Yeshayahu 45:18**, “the earth was not created empty”, revealing a contradiction between the account in **Bereshith** and what the prophet Yeshayahu wrote. The student will notice right away that something appears to be missing. Not that something in the text is missing, but rather we are not being told something that was intentionally left out. How did the earth become empty as stated in **Bereshith 1:1-2**? In the **Midrash (Gen .Rabbah 3:7)** a question is asked concerning what Elohim was occupied with prior to the creation of our world. The **Midrash** states that Elohim was busy building and destroying other worlds. There is a secret, unfathomable from the verses alone, regarding creation, namely there may have been cycles prior to ours.

- *Rabbi Judah b. R. Simon said: "'Let there be evening' is not written here, but 'And there was evening'; hence we know that a time-order existed before this." Rabbi Abahu said: "This proves that the Holy One, blessed be He, went on creating worlds and destroying them until He created this one, and declared, 'This one pleases Me; those did not please Me.'" Rabbi Pinchas said: "This is R. Abahu's reason: 'And Elohim saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good' (Genesis 1:31). This pleases Me, but those did not please Me. (**Midrash Rabbah - Genesis III:***
- **Ramban Shmos 21:2** *A And the seventh was chosen for days, for years, and for Shemita but it all relates to another matter and this is the secret of the age of the universe (sod y'mos ha'olam)*

The student must understand that Kabbalistic language is highly cryptic and coded. One cannot just pick up the **Zohar** or other ancient writings and read them and understand them. Understanding a mystical text is not done the way one reads the Talmud, with rational, logic, and analytical learning. It comes from being prepared by years of study and living the Torah life-style. One cannot come out of a pagan religion world-view and quickly study the Kabbalistic texts. One must have their minds renewed by years of studying in the true Hebraic manner. Reading Christian commentaries and authors cannot help us in understanding the ancient writings. We have to go to the source and those who have protected the Torah and its interpretations from the beginning.

It is written in **Vayikra** (Lev.) that, “for six years you shall plow your fields, but the seventh year shall be holy to YHWH...” In the **Talmud (San98a)** it is said, “six thousand years shall the world last, then for one thousand years shall it remain desolate.” The sages teach that our world or civilization will be measured as in the Scriptural Sabbatical year. Six years we labor, and in the seventh we shall rest. Our civilization shall last six thousand years and then for one thousand years it shall be desolate, or left alone to rest. After the seventh millennium, Elohim shall renew His creation.

- *Rav Kattina said: "The world will exist for 6000 years and one (thousand) of destruction" ... We have a teaching which is in agreement with Rav Kattina, as the seventh is the sabbatical year - one in seven years. Likewise the*

world will rest 1,000 in 7000 ... a thousand years in Your eyes are like yesterday which has passed ... [Psalms 90:4]. (Sanhedrin 97a)

The text in Vayikra then speaks of the Jubilee year (*Yovel*). We are commanded to count seven times seven years and then proclaim the Jubilee, a year of complete release³. Now, if we have the Sabbatical cycle for our civilization, then it only follows that there will be or has been seven cycles corresponding to the Sabbatical and Jubilee cycles. Therefore, human civilization has or will rise and fall seven times, each a period of six thousand years, with a thousand years of rest between cycles.

What Sabbatical cycle are we in? The sages say we are not in the first *Shemita* cycle due to the account in Bereshith and the text in Yeshayahu. The earth was created full and only became empty as a result of the previous civilization. They are the ones who left the land empty and desolate. Many sages believe we are now in the second *Shemita* cycle. However, they do not dismiss the idea we could be in the third, fourth, or even the fifth *Shemita* cycle. They do agree we are definitely not in the first cycle.

- Shabbat 88: B R. *Joshua b. Levi also said: "When Moses ascended on high, the ministering angels spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Sovereign of the Universe! What business has one born of woman amongst us?' 'He has come to receive the Torah,' answered He to them. Said they to Him, 'That secret treasure, which has been hidden by Thee for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the world was created.*

The concept of pre-Adamic cycles was well known among the early authorities and often cited in their works. Rabbi Isaac of Akko says that the Sabbatical cycles existed before Adam and their chronology must be measured not in human (earth) years, but in Divine years.⁴ Rabbi Yisrael Lifshitz, the author of a commentary to the Mishna, Tiferet Yisrael, says that Adam was not the first human being, but that there were pre-Adamites. Rabbi Fatiyah, in Minchat Yehuda, pg.222. teaches that the Zohar speaks of the pre-Adamic parents of Adam. The Talmud in Hagigah 13b tells of 974 pre-Adamic generations. The Ma'arekhet Elokut states that these generations in the Talmud refer to pre-Adamic *Shemita* cycles. The Sha'at Ratzon commentary on the Tikkunei Zohar makes a clear reference to the *Shemitot*. In an ancient mystical treatise called "Sefer Hat'munah" - the Book of the Picture it states that there is a cosmic *Shemita* cycle which effects the creation and duration of existence.

- *According to the master Kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac of Acco, when counting the years of these cycles, one must not use an ordinary physical year, but rather, a divine year (Otzar Chaim 86b). The Midrash says that each divine day is a thousand years, basing this on the verse, "A thousand years in Your sight are as but yesterday", Psalm*

³ The Seven universes spoken of in the Sefer Yetzirah refer to the doctrine of Sabbaticals. This states there are seven distinct periods of creation, each lasting 7,000 years (7 X 7).

⁴ If this is true, then the Sefer HaTemunah is speaking of Divine years where it states the world is 42,000 years old. If a Divine day is 1,000 years, then a Divine year is equal to 365,250 earth years. Thus, according to Rabbi Isaac of Akko, the universe would be 42,000 X 365,250 years old. This comes to a total of 15,340,500,000 years. Interestingly the Big bang theory (the George Gamow theory) says the universe began 15 billion years ago. This is a truth that Torah sages knew centuries ago.

90:4 (*Bereshit Rabbah* 8:2, *Zohar* 2: 145b, *Sanhedrin* 97a). Since each year contains 365.25 days, a divine year would be 365,250 years long. According to this, each cycle of seven thousand divine years would consist of 2,556,750,000 earthly years. This figure of 2.5 billion years is very close to the scientific estimate as to the length of time that life has existed on earth. If we assume that the seventh cycle began with the Biblical account of creation, then this would have occurred when the universe was 15,340,500,000 years old. This is very close to the scientific estimate that the expansion of the universe began some 15 billion years ago. **---Sefer Yetzirah, commentary by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, published by Weiser, 1997, page 186.**

The student must remember that Kabbalistic learning does not follow *halakhic* learning. Whereas *Halakah* needs authoritative conclusions to decide the proper Torah practice, this is not the case with Kabbalah. This is why people struggle in learning Kabbalah. No true student of the Torah should quickly dismiss the idea of the *Shemita* cycle in creation based upon their preconceived notions are previous teachings. While existence as we know it may come to an end in the year 6000, another cycle may well be awaiting us.

- *The bible does not describe things in terms of objective truths known only to Elohim, but in terms of human understanding... The Bible uses human language when it speaks of the "rising and setting of the sun" and not of the rotation of the earth, just as Copernicus, Kepler, and other such scientists, in their words and writings, spoke of the rising and setting of the sun without thereby contradicting truths they had derived from their own scientific conclusions. Loshon benei Adam, "human language", which is also the language of the Bible, describes the processes and phenomena of nature in terms of the impression they make on the human senses, without thereby meaning to prejudice, in any manner, the findings of scientific research. ---S.R. Hirsch. **Collected Writing, volume 7 (New York: Feldheim, 1992), page 57.***
- *Dr. Gerald Schroeder, author of **Genesis and the Big Bang** says dinosaurs aren't ruled out by the Torah. Genesis 1:21 says "And Elohim created the large taninim...." This plural noun has been variously translated as crocodiles, whales, or sea-monsters; but could easily mean "reptiles." Surely dinosaurs belong in the class of "large reptiles." As for the age of this world Schroeder says, "The Jewish calendar measures time from the creation of Adam; the six days of Genesis have never been included in calculations of the world's age." And those six pre-Adamic "days" needn't be the standard 24-hour days experienced by us mortals after Adam's creation; but could be longer eras, experienced quite differently by YHWH. Schroeder explains relative time this way: "When talking of time, perspective is crucial, as Einstein discovered. Events can be correctly measured as lasting 24 hours here on Earth; yet when observed from another spot may be seen as lasting anywhere from seconds to billions of years, depending on differences in gravity and velocity between the two locations. Such is the nature of time. Scientists measure the billions of years of the planet's existence from our perspective here on Earth. The amazing reality is that by considering the universe to be a single vast object, and by calculating time as*

*it would pass for a being outside that object, those eons lasted exactly six days! So there were only six days before Adam, but these were six Days, as viewed from a divine perspective."Scientific knowledge, he concludes, doesn't threaten Jewish religion. "The real threat is ignorance-secular ignorance of the Torah's true depth, and the believers' ignorance of the natural laws by which our universe functions."
Jerusalem Post, international edition, week ending 4 Sept. 93).*