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NEW ATHEISTS ON GENESIS 1-11 AND 19

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Abstract: When the Neo- or “New Atheist” publishing frenzy climaxed with Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion*, Daniel C. Dennett’s *Breaking the Spell*, Sam Harris’s *The End of Faith*, Christopher Hitchens’ *god is not Great* and subsequent titles; New Atheists repeatedly denounced the Bible as dangerously false, suppressive to scientific inquiry, and as inculcating and promoting problematic, contemptible, even abhorrent moral values. The Genesis 1-11 and 19 Creation, Noah, and Lot narratives persist among the New Atheists’ favorite targets. Heretofore there has been no systematic examination of New Atheist treatments of Genesis generally or Genesis 1-11 and 19 particularly. This article scrutinizes leading New Atheist interpretations of Genesis 1-11 and 19 articulated by Richard Dawkins, Daniel C. Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. Part one documents these New Atheist renderings of Genesis 1-11 and 19 through the entire corpus of their published books. Part two synthesizes, applies, and extends relevant Genesis 1-11 and 19 scholarship to appraise and respond to the most serious New Atheist allegations, concluding that a more rigorous analysis of Genesis 1-11 and 19 nullifies and potentially reverses New Atheist criticisms.

Key Words: Genesis, atheism, science, ethics, theodicy, Hebrew Scripture, Old Testament, God, hermeneutics, exegesis, creationism, morality, Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens, Harris, Darwin, Noah, Sodom

“What in me is dark illumine,
 What is low raise and support;
 That to the heighth of this great argument
 I may assert Eternal Providence
 And justify the ways of God to men.”
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 1, Lines 22-26.¹

Introduction

Since formerly unknown graduate student Sam Harris published *The End of Faith* in 2004, a veritable cavalcade of bestselling books and other writings by “Neo-” or “New Atheists” has received significant attention in the media, academia, and other forums. These surprisingly successful titles include Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion* and *The Greatest Show on Earth*, Daniel C. Dennett’s *Breaking the Spell*, Sam Harris’s *Letter to a Christian Nation* and *The Moral Landscape*, and the late Christopher Hitchens’ *god is not Great*, *Hitch 22*, and *Arguably*.² These New Atheists condemn the Bible as dangerously false and abhorrent, with selections from Genesis 1-11 and 19 among their favorite targets. In spite of this, there has been no systematic examination of New Atheist treatments of Genesis generally or Genesis 1-11 and 19 particularly.

It is tempting for scholars of religion, especially Old Testament/Hebrew Bible scholars, to flippantly discard New Atheist interpretations of the Bible. Dawkins, Dennett, and Harris hold doctorates in science or philosophy, but none of the “core four” New Atheists (adding Hitchens) is a trained Bible or religion scholar.³ Nevertheless, these “four horsemen” as they are also called, warrant careful analysis because of their massive media presence, their impact on popular European and American consciousness, and their cumulative book sales in the millions.⁴ Harris also won a 2005 PEN/Martha Albrand Award for nonfiction. Hitchens’ *god is not Great* was nominated for a National Book Award. Dawkins has received a swath of honorary doctorates and accolades, including *TIME Magazine* profiling him in 2007 as one of one hundred people, “whose power, talent or moral example is transforming the world.”⁵

Richard Dawkins on Genesis 1-11 and 19

Dawkins opens *The God Delusion* chapter two with, “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sado-

masochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”⁶ Dawkins protests it is unfair to attack such an easy target, but urgently necessary because of widespread belief in the “Abrahamic God.”⁷ Dawkins devotes a full chapter of *The God Delusion* to “The ‘Good’ Book and the Moral Zeitgeist,” since, “God, or some other Biblical character might serve as...a role model.”⁸

Dawkins first deprecates the story of Noah in Genesis 5-10. “Derived from the Babylonian myth of Uta-Napisthim and known from the older mythologies of several cultures...the moral of the story of Noah is appalling. God took a dim view of humans, so he (with the exception of one family) drowned the lot of them including children, and also, for good measure, the rest of the (presumably blameless) animals as well.”⁹ The Flood narrative is doubly problematic because, “a frighteningly large number of people still do take their scriptures, including the story of Noah, literally.”¹⁰ Such literalists then supposedly extend its application to blame other natural disasters like tsunamis and Hurricane Katrina on human sin. “You’d think an omnipotent God would adopt a slightly more targeted approach to zapping sinners.”¹¹

A second narrative attracting Dawkins’ fire is the demolition of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. “In the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Noah equivalent, chosen to be spared with his family because he was uniquely righteous, was Abraham’s nephew Lot.”¹² When Lot invited two messengers of the Lord who were visiting Sodom into his home, the men of Sodom surrounded the house and demanded to have sex with the messengers. But Lot refused, saying, “Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you bring them out to you bring them out unto you...only unto the men do nothing; for therefore they came under the shadow of my roof” (Genesis 19:7-8).¹³ Dawkins sneers:

Whatever this strange story might mean, it surely tells us about the respect accorded to women in this intensely religious culture. As it happened, Lot’s bargaining away of his daughter’s virginity proved unnecessary...the whole household escaped, with the exception of Lot’s unfortunate wife, whom the Lord turned into a pillar of salt...(for) looking over her shoulder at the fireworks.”¹⁴

Lot’s daughters are not blameless either. They rape their father, perhaps as payback for offering them to the mob. “Starved of male company, they decided to make their father drunk and copulate with him...If this dysfunctional family was the best Sodom had to offer by the way of morals, some might begin to feel a certain sympathy with God and his judicial brimstone.”¹⁵

Beyond flood and fire, Dawkins is markedly upset by popular appropriations and “literal” readings of Genesis, including a “murky underworld of creationist propaganda.”¹⁶ Dawkins compares Creationists to “well-organized, well-financed, and politically muscular groups of Holocaust-deniers.”¹⁷ He calls for “enlightened” bishops and theologians to put more effort into combating this “anti-scientific nonsense that they deplore.”¹⁸ Dawkins commends “natural selection...(as) a process that generates the statistically improbable,” but then strangely without sharing his calculations in either case, rejects “divine creation...(for being) statistically improbable.”¹⁹ Dawkins further complains that otherwise capable scientists like Kurt Wise are corrupted and lose credibility when they are forced to choose between evolution and Scripture.²⁰

Despite Dawkins’ ridicule of “literal” readings of Genesis and his antagonism toward God, Noah, and Lot’s family as role models; Dawkins is not against education about the Bible. He is particularly enthusiastic about the literary, historical, and cultural impact of the King James Version (KJV) which in Genesis inspired English phrases like, “Be fruitful and multiply, East of Eden, Adam’s Rib, Am I my brother’s keeper?, The mark of Cain, As old as Methuselah, A mess of potage, Sold his birthright, Jacob’s ladder, Coat of many colours...(and) The fat of the land.”²¹ Dawkins even cites Genesis as poetically anticipating Darwin, “Our lives are governed by cycles, just as Darwin said – and Genesis before him: ‘While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.’”²²

Christopher Hitchens on Genesis 1-11 and 19:

Hitchens feels the urge, whether for humor’s sake or in all seriousness, to commence *god is not Great* with self-congratulation. “I frequently passed ‘top’ in scripture class. It was my first introduction to practical and textual criticism. I would read all the chapters that led up to the verse, and all the ones that followed it, to be sure that I had got the ‘point’ of the original...I can still do this, greatly to the annoyance of some of my enemies.”²³

Hitchens’ self-avowed scrupulousness supposedly elicits within him, “respect for those whose style is sometimes dismissed as ‘merely’ Talmudic...or ‘fundamentalist.’”²⁴ But he is singularly unimpressed with Creationists, even associating Creationism with abusive behavior:

By all means let a congregation that believes in whipping out the devil choose a new grown-up sinner each week and lash him until he or she bleeds. By all means let anyone who believes in

creationism instruct his fellows during lunch breaks. But the conscription of an unprotected child for these purposes is something that even the most dedicated secularist can safely describe as sin.²⁵

In *Letters to a Young Contrarian*, Hitchens groups creationism together with racism as somehow abolished by “unspooling...the genome.”²⁶ Hitchens neglects to note committed Christian (but not Creationist) Francis Collins’ leadership in mapping the human genome. Hitchens elsewhere playfully digs, “In the book of Genesis, god (Hitchens declines to capitalize “God,” as indicated by his book title) made all the world in six days and rested on the seventh...leaving room for speculation as to what he did on the eighth day.”²⁷

Eighth day “speculation” may be superfluous given God’s continued activity in Genesis, but it is perhaps consistent with Hitchens’ hyperbole, “I don’t believe there is a single word of truth in either Exodus or Genesis.”²⁸ Hitchens sees little to awe-inspire in Genesis either.²⁹

As countless others before him, including Harris and Dennett, Hitchens inverts the declaration of Genesis 1:26, 1:27, 5:3, and 9:6 that God created humanity in God’s image, and characterizes Biblical authors as “provincial yokels” who write God in *their* image.³⁰ Hitchens obscures the fact that people partly perceiving God based on how they perceive themselves, parents, or other familiar objects does not demonstrate that God must be pure or partial projection since God’s existence and character need not depend on human conceptions.

Having already dismissed the notion of a Divine Being to divinely inspire, Hitchens scoffs at the idea of divine inspiration for the Pentateuch in chapter seven of *god is not Great*, “Revelation: The Nightmare of the ‘Old’ Testament.” But Hitchens cannot resist asking why God would “reveal himself only to unlettered and quasi-historical individuals, in regions of Middle Eastern wasteland that were long the home of idol worship and superstition?”³¹ Possible strategies for God doing this or its less farcical equivalent are evidently not worth pursuing.

Hitchens assails the Noahic Flood narrative not by denouncing its morality like Dawkins, but by trying to explain it away with natural explanations as an archetype or collective memory:

The folk memory, now confirmed by archaeology, makes it seem highly probable that huge inundations occurred when the Black Sea and the Mediterranean were formed, and that these forbidding and terrifying events continued to impress the storytellers of Mesopotamia and elsewhere. Every year, Christian fundamentalists renew their expeditions to Mount Ararat in modern

Armenia, convinced that one day they will discover the wreckage of Noah's Ark. This effort is futile and would prove nothing even if it were successful, but if these people should chance to read the reconstructions of what really did happen, they would find themselves confronted with something far more memorable than the banal account of Noah's flood: a sudden massive wall of dark water roaring across a thickly populated plain. This "Atlantis" event would have adhered to prehistoric memory, all right, as indeed it does to ours.³²

Hitchens' attempt to discredit the Bible by appealing to natural phenomena may be inspired by Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* conjecturing natural origins for Biblical "manna."³³

Aphids—greenfly and similar bugs—are highly specialized for sucking the juice out of plants. They pump the sap up out of the plants' veins more efficiently than they subsequently digest it. The result is that they excrete a liquid that has had only some of its nutritious value extracted. Droplets of sugar-rich 'honeydew' pass out of the back end at a great rate, in some cases more than the insects own body-weight every hour. The honeydew normally rains down on to the ground—it may well have been the providential food known as 'manna' in the Old Testament.³⁴

Regrettably in Hitchens' view, belief in Genesis is bolstered by claims of at least partial historicity by American scholars like William Foxwell Albright and French Dominican archaeologist Roland de Vaux. Hitchens quotes de Vaux, "If the historical faith of Israel is not founded in history, such faith is erroneous, and therefore, our faith is also."³⁵

Hitchens sweepingly snubs De Vaux and Albright by quoting Thomas Paine that Moses was not the author of Genesis, and Genesis contains no mention of Moses.³⁶ Without citing chapter or verse, Hitchens muses, "The Pentateuch contains two discrepant accounts of creation, two different genealogies of the seed of Adam, and two narratives of the flood."³⁷ Hitchens alleges the Pentateuch is consequently historically (and otherwise?) unreliable. Hitchens assumes repetition or retelling is somehow forbidden to the narrator(s), and that varied emphasis equals discontinuity. But Hitchens with Edward Said elsewhere opposed contemporary Jewish claims to Israel by appealing to Genesis as if it were (or at least perceived as) reliable history.³⁸

Probably Hitchens' most scornful criticism of Genesis appears in *god is not Great* chapter fifteen, "Religion as an Original Sin." Like Dawkins, Hitchens takes up the Abraham and Lot narrative. "There is no softening...of this frightful story. The prelude involves a series of vilenesses and delusions...the seduction of Lot by both his daughters...and many other credible and incredible rustic crimes and misdemeanors."³⁹

Dennett and Harris on Genesis 1-11 and 19:

Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris deal less with narrative portions of Genesis, preferring primarily to bemoan Creationism for which Genesis bears purported responsibility. After all, where else do Creationists get their principal source of cosmogony but Genesis 1-3?⁴⁰

Despite Dennett's bait-and-switch title *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* extolling Darwinian philosophy and excoriating alternative hypotheses like Creationism, Dennett engages Genesis 1-11 and 19 the least of the four core New Atheists.⁴¹ In *Breaking the Spell*, Dennett vacillates between condescension and conciliation. "Few are comfortable acknowledging just how far we've come from the God of Genesis 2:21, who literally plucks a rib from Adam and closes up the flesh (with his fingers, one imagines), before sculpting Eve on the spot."⁴² Yet Dennett concedes that even among believers who cling to "literal" understandings of the text, "Many take the Bible to be the Word of God but *don't* read it to rule out evolution."⁴³

As with Dawkins and Hitchens, Dennett vilifies teaching Creationism to children. "(In) a recent poll (Dennett deigns to cite which poll), 48 percent of the people in the United States today believe that the book of Genesis is literally true...70 percent believe that 'creation science' should be taught in school alongside evolution...misinforming a child is a terrible offense."⁴⁴

Dennett alludes in passing to the Noahic Flood once in *Content and Consciousness* and once in *Freedom Evolves*.⁴⁵ In *Consciousness Explained*, Dennett uses the Flood as an analogy for studying the brain and phenomenology:

There are two ways of studying Noah's Flood: you can assume that it is sheer myth but still an eminently studiable myth, or you can ask whether some actual meteorological or geological catastrophe lies behind it. Both investigations can be scientific, but the first is less speculative. If you want to speculate along the second lines, the first thing you should do is conduct a careful investigation along the first lines to gather what the hints are.⁴⁶

In the end, it is not Dennett but Sam Harris on Genesis 1-11—or popular interpretations or beliefs about Genesis 1-11—where the New Atheism reaches the pinnacle of vacuity. “Many who themselves get elected—believe that dinosaurs lived two by two upon Noah’s ark...that the first members of our species were fashioned out of dirt and divine breath, in a garden with a talking snake, by the hand of an invisible God.”⁴⁷ Apparently for Harris, reading Genesis literally bodes poorly for public policy. Harris likens people who believe in a Garden of Eden, Noahic Flood, and a six (twenty-four hour) day creation to, “the fanatics of the Muslim world...the American heartland is fast becoming as blinkered as the wilds of Afghanistan.”⁴⁸

Also receiving a portion of Harris’s wrath are so-called liberal or mainstream journalists, “the likes of Bill Moyers” who dare to convene, “earnest gatherings of scholars for the high purpose of determining just how the book of Genesis can be reconciled with life in the modern world. As we stride boldly into the Middle Ages, it does not seem out of place to wonder whether the myths that now saturate our discourse will wind up killing many of us, as the myths of others already have.”⁴⁹ Harris fails to supply examples or indications of Creationists or liberal religious believers killing or agitating for war and butchery based on reading Genesis.⁵⁰

Harris in his 2010 bestseller, *The Moral Landscape*, implies “Biblical Creationism” and science are mutually exclusive categories. For Harris, Creationists by definition cannot be scientists and a scientist cannot be a Creationist. “There are trained ‘scientists’ who are Biblical Creationists, and their ‘scientific’ thinking is purposed toward interpreting the data of science to fit the Book of Genesis. Such people claim to be doing ‘science’ of course, but real scientists are free, and indeed obligated, to point out that they are misusing the term.”⁵¹

Harris then snickers that the existence of thousands of beetle species somehow undercuts Creationism as well as the idea that the universe was designed at all. “The biologist J.B.S. Haldane is reported to have said that, if there is a God, he has ‘an inordinate fondness for beetles.’ One would have hoped that an observation this devastating would have closed the book on creationism for all time.”⁵² And, “any honest reading of the biblical account of creation suggests that God created all animals and plants as we now see them.”⁵³ Harris’s jeers are surely non-sequiturs even for “literal” readings of Genesis. If God created all living beings, God need not create any or all as static and changeless with features frozen in eternal immutability.

Harris additionally objects Dawkins-like to the Noahic Flood, christening religious believers contemptible for appealing to mystery and for defending God’s allowing or instigating the Flood. “We (you believers) cannot say, for instance, that God was wrong to drown most of humanity

in the flood of Genesis, because this is merely the way it seems from our limited point of view.”⁵⁴

Summary of the New Atheists on Genesis 1-11 and 19:

Before consulting scholarly literature on Genesis 1-11 and 19 to shed light on the New Atheists’ less frivolous and less satirical criticisms, an outline of their serious concerns is useful:

1. “Literal” understandings of Genesis 1-3 and Genesis 6-10 (generally, Genesis 1-11).
2. Natural explanations of the Noahic Flood, and by extension Sodom and Gomorrah.
3. God’s justice in drowning most animals and humanity in the Noahic Flood.
4. God’s judgment regarding Sodom, Gomorrah, and Lot’s family (Genesis 19).

“Literal” Understandings of Genesis 1-11?

One way of replying to New Atheist qualms about “literal” readings of Genesis 1-11 is to acknowledge that contemporary mainstream Bible scholars, as well as many historic Jewish and Christian commentators, agree Genesis 1-11 is not a “literal” or scientifically oriented text. Scholars overwhelmingly classify the literary forms in Genesis 1-11 as human origins stories, primeval history, cosmogony, folklore, poetic saga, liturgy, or as mythical themes interspersed with genealogy.⁵⁵ Pope John Paul II for example, saw Genesis not as a “scientific treatise,” but as displaying the glorious relationship of God with God’s creation.⁵⁶ Richard Clifford adds:

It is important at the outset to note the differences between the ancient and modern understandings of creation. Modern common-sense definitions of creation are inadequate for the biblical texts; they read back into ancient documents the modern spirit shaped by scientific and evolutionary thinking...(Genesis 1-3 is) drama versus scientific report...Drama selects, omits, concentrates; it need not render a complete account.⁵⁷

The Genesis drama resembles the Akkadian creation epic *Enuma elish* by portraying victory for the forces of order (in Genesis 1: God) over chaos (in Genesis 1: the waters).⁵⁸ The seven-part (heptadic) structure speaks of harmony and beauty in creation, with the repetitive phrasing providing rhythm for Genesis 1 as “a great hymn.”⁵⁹

Nevertheless, according to Christiana de Groot, scholars have some basis for believing Genesis contains factual, if not meticulous or exhaustive scientific content. Even if Genesis is not a strict or stringent history text in the academic sense of, “independently verifiable by two or more sources of witnesses,” it may still be rooted in or recount real events.⁶⁰ Contra Hitchens, Genesis not mentioning Moses does not disallow Mosaic authorship, nor does it necessarily undermine Genesis recording history reliably. Biblical authors need not limit themselves to autobiography, nor be presumed to anticipate modern formatting and referencing expectations.

What does this imply for New Atheist depictions of Genesis 1-11 and 19? If Genesis’ genres include drama, folklore, genealogy, literary myth, liturgy and poetry, then New Atheists are misguided in interacting with Genesis as they would with a scientific or technical manual. Nor do Biblical scholars who are religious recoil from recognizing varied genres in Genesis, as if to do so would undercut Jewish (e.g. Levenson) or Christian (e.g. Brueggemann) faith.

To anticipate the objection that fundamental New Atheist quibbles are not with Genesis as drama, poetry, liturgy, or primeval history; but people understanding Genesis “literally,” this is again a cavil shared by many Biblical scholars and people of faith who wish literalists would by the objectors’ standards read Genesis in ways appropriate to its genres. As Dennett admits, many people “take the Bible to be the Word of God but don’t read it to rule out evolution.”⁶¹

For example, scientists like Francis Collins in *The Language of God*, Kenneth Miller in *Finding Darwin’s God* and numerous other “theistic evolutionists” resolutely affirm the sacred value of Genesis.⁶² Even Creationists hold a range of views on the age of the earth, the length of “days” in Genesis 1, and the universal or geographically limited scope of the Noahic Flood.⁶³

One could also suggest that to whatever degree Creationists use science to question or challenge reigning paradigms, New Atheists can welcome or at least not censor Creationists in the spirit of investigation and free inquiry. Why are New Atheists so terrified by “literal” and even “liberal” readings of Genesis? Is it because children will hear more than one perspective on human origins, an origin that puts God at the forefront? Or, is Sam Harris sincere in clamoring that literal and liberal readings of Genesis lead to killing? Scientific accuracy aside, the Darwinian paradigm has a far worse record abetting atrocity via its approbation by Marxists, Nietzsches, and Nazis who used Darwinian philosophy to justify history’s most extensive massacres to date as Dennett vaguely concedes in *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*.⁶⁴

While Genesis 9 and 11 have been employed in narrow and feckless ways to reinforce racism and apartheid, history has yet to record Genesis buttressing murderous ideologies.⁶⁵ The worst Dawkins musters without

providing specific examples are Creationist parents allegedly sending “menacing letters” to science teachers.⁶⁶

Nor does evolution in and of itself sustain the respect for human dignity or any other part of creation connoted by Genesis 1. As C.S. Lewis lampooned in “Hymn to Evolution,” “Lead us, evolution, lead us, / Up the future’s endless stair, / Chop us, change us, prod us, weed us, / For stagnation is despair / Groping, guessing, yet progressing, / Lead us, nobody knows where.”⁶⁷

Natural Explanations for the Noahic Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah:

Dennett proposes two ways of studying Noah’s Flood: 1) as a sheer myth, or 2) to discern a meteorological or geological catastrophe behind it.⁶⁸ Hitchens takes a stab at the second option, hoping to discredit the Noahic Flood by providing a natural or alternative account for it.⁶⁹

Putting aside Hitchens’ lack of scientific or archaeological citation concerning supposed origins of the Flood story, as well as difficulties reconstructing “what really did happen,” natural explanations in no way disprove a flood of Biblical proportions but *ipso facto* admit something like it occurred by indicating phenomena that might have transpired. “All the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened” (Genesis 7:11, NIV).

Nor is it clear what Hitchens has in mind that discovery of Noah’s ark wreckage, “would prove nothing.”⁷⁰ Even if such a discovery would not constitute unassailable watertight proof, it would corroborate Genesis even if after millennia of decay the ark failed to conform precisely to Genesis dimensions. But assuming Noah’s Ark is never found, this in no way threatens Genesis or its possible historicity any more than countless other lost artifacts disprove events associated with them. If archaeologists fail to relocate or reassemble the original *Nina*, *Pinta* and *Santa Maria*, this does not by itself shatter history’s record of Columbus sailing across the Atlantic.

Hitchens’ attempt to discredit a historical Noahic Flood by appealing to natural phenomena is not unlike citing tsunamis, storms, earthquakes, volcanic activity, or “wind setdown effects” to justify or explain away the red sea (or sea of reeds) parting in Exodus 14-15.⁷¹ As Cambridge physicist and engineer Colin Humphreys declared in *The Miracles of Exodus: A Scientist’s Discovery of the Extraordinary Natural Causes of the Bible Stories*, “a natural explanation of the events of the Exodus doesn’t to my mind make them any less (momentous or) miraculous...What made certain natural events miraculous was their timing.”⁷²

Rather than harnessing natural phenomena to try to debunk Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna cites them to illuminate Sodom and Gomorrah’s destruction in Genesis 19:

The Hebrew h-f-kh, which simply means “transform completely,” is a general term for destruction without specifying the means...the earthquake theory is the most plausible. The entire Jordan Valley is part of the Syrian-African Rift, a gigantic fracture in the crust of the earth caused by a series of geological spasms. It stretches from Syria in the north, down the Arabah to the Gulf of Akaba, through the Red Sea to the upper Nile Valley and on to Lake Nyasa in East Africa. In this Sodom story we may well be dealing with a description of one of the last earthquakes that shaped the lower Jordan valley area in historical times.

It is well known that the fissures formed by quakes often allow heat and gases to escape from the earth. Lightning, frequently present during earthquakes, would have ignited the sulfur and bitumen existing in the area (14:10). A catastrophic conflagration would result (cf. Deut 29:22). This would explain the utter ruination of the cities, the extinction of their inhabitants, and the obliteration of all vegetation in the region (v. 24) as well as the smoke that Abraham saw rising from the land (v.28).⁷³

Hypothesizing natural phenomena accompanying or contributing to the Noahic Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, or parting the Red/Reed Sea may not “prove” Genesis or Exodus on the level of mathematical certainty. But neither does it furnish disproof of any sort. If anything, natural explanations illumine and substantiate the Biblical accounts.

God’s Justice and the Noahic Flood:

According to Genesis, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great...every inclination...of their hearts was only evil continually...filled with violence...all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth...But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord...a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God” (Genesis 6:5-11, NRSV).

What went wrong between Eden and the Flood? Genesis laments human sin permeating the entire created order. God’s response merits a comparable scope.⁷⁴

In contrast to ‘all’ the ‘good’ that God ‘saw’ in (Genesis) 1:31, here God sees (only wickedness)...both sinful acts and their consequences. The indictment encompasses not simply actions, but the inner recesses of the human heart...thought, word, and deed...*only, every, and continually* specify the breadth and depth of the sinful human condition...God does not act from sudden and arbitrary impulses...The basic character of the human heart is set alongside the response of the divine heart. God appears, not as an angry and vengeful judge, but as a grieving and pained parent, distressed at what has happened...God whose heart has been broken, announces a judgment (v. 7), which is nonetheless thoroughgoing and uncompromising...the flood would involve cleansing...God’s showing favor to Noah (v. 8), however, moderates the judgmental decision...creation had begun to fail...God now begins the task of restoration.⁷⁵

Derek Kidner and David John Atkinson assert the Hebrew word “corrupt,” indicates that what God decided to destroy may have virtually self-destructed already.⁷⁶ Assahoto and Ngewa extrapolate, “Though the rest of creation had not participated in human sin, it has been contaminated by contact...Sin is like yeast, which affects a whole loaf of bread...human corruption drew all creation down in ruin...the head of a household affects not only himself but also his entire household.”⁷⁷ God utilizes the Flood to make an end and start afresh.

For Brueggemann, Westerman, and Wilkinson, corruption warranting a cataclysm like the Flood should affect us to the depth of our being—not principally because of God’s drastic rejoinder—but because of the depth of human depravity demanding it.⁷⁸ Medieval Jewish commentator Rashi speculates that even amid this degeneracy the rain might have initially “descended slowly, so if the population repented, the rain would be a blessing and just water the crops. When the people refused to repent, the rain turned into a flood.”⁷⁹ The pre-Flood population “had their chance and threw it away.”⁸⁰ This is in stark contrast with the wicked but later repentant Ninevites in the story of Jonah whom God subsequently spared.

As for Dawkins’ zinger, “You’d think an omnipotent God would adopt a slightly more targeted approach to zapping sinners,” this is precisely what God does by saving Noah, the bearer of a better possibility.⁸¹ Noah undergoes the gargantuan task of building an ark and gathering birds and animals to preserve survival of every “kind” (Genesis 1:11-25, 6:20, 7:14). That Noah’s “generation” (Genesis 6:9, 7:1) included no other righteous

candidates, seemingly even among the very young, highlights how pervasive human corruption was before the Flood.⁸²

God's integrity in Genesis contrasts with gods in other ancient flood narratives Dawkins alludes to like the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Jewish scholar Everett Fox observes that in *Gilgamesh*, "the gods plan the destruction of the world for reasons unclear (or in one version, because humankind's noise is disturbing the sleep of the gods), and...the protagonist, Utnapishtim, is saved as the result of a god's favoritism without any moral judgments being passed."⁸³

God's promise after the Flood to never again destroy all, again indicating scope (Genesis 8:21), expresses faithfulness not only to Noah, but to the larger creation.⁸⁴ God "remembers" or takes notice of Noah and every type of animal and bird.⁸⁵ God brings order and fresh goodness out of the watery chaos, as God did in Genesis 1.⁸⁶ God reiterates the command to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28, 9:1).⁸⁷

God's achievement in the Noahic Flood is thus not merely the dispensation of judgment, but the saving of righteous Noah and Noah's family, along with every kind of animal to repopulate the earth afresh. In contrast to the "gods" in other ancient flood narratives, God is just and merciful, even deeply grieving the catastrophe.⁸⁸ In the end, Dawkins is right, but not in the way Dawkins expects. The story of Noah is "appalling," but it is appalling because of the depths of human immorality that devastated God's creation.⁸⁹ The New Atheists' indictment of God's justice in the Noahic Flood recedes or even evaporates in the light of more careful analysis.

Other issues could be raised regarding the purpose of suffering and death in the drama of creation, or human free will and God's foreknowledge, or God's reason for allowing less severe floods after promising the waters would never again become a flood to destroy all flesh (Genesis 9:15). But these issues will not be discussed here since the New Atheists do not address them.

Sodom, Gomorrah, and Lot's family (Genesis 19):

Justice and values embedded in the Flood narrative are paralleled in the fiery obliteration of Sodom and Gomorrah, with the sparing of Lot and his daughters in Genesis 19. When Abraham perceives God's plan to destroy Sodom, Abraham asks, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous (or innocent) with the wicked?...Far be it from you to do such a thing...Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Genesis 18:23-25, NRSV)⁹⁰

Everett Fox notes that while Abraham seems to test God, the reverse may be intended.⁹¹ Alternatively, both the patriarch's and God's morality are tested. "Can God trust Abraham? Can Abraham trust God? The answer to both questions is yes."⁹² Abraham emerges as a heroic figure deeply

revering God, yet politely demanding justice in this first time the Bible records a human questioning a divine decision.⁹³ Abraham recognizes God will act justly concerning Sodom, whereas God avoiding judgment might allow Sodom's evil to persist unchecked.⁹⁴

Just as God chooses Abraham to bless the world through Abraham's descendants and to teach his household the ways of righteousness, so God righteously responds to Abraham, providentially anticipating Dawkins' worry about role modeling.⁹⁵ God agrees to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if as few as ten righteous people live there, despite the agonized "outcry" (18:20, 18:32) against Sodom and Gomorrah by unidentified victims.⁹⁶ Gordon Wenham comments, "It is not that God needs to go down to confirm...he is visiting...with a view to judgment...but the final "if not" gives a chink of hope, and on this...Abraham bases his plea."⁹⁷

Mark Sheridan cites ancient Christians Origen and John Chrysostom seeing God's forbearance toward wicked Sodom indicating God's astonishing patience and love. As with corruption before the Flood and again in contrast with the repentant Ninevites, no one in Sodom or Gomorrah wished to "know" God's mercy, so God did not "know" them.⁹⁸

Sol Scharfstein deduces that less than ten righteous people would constitute a tiny minority easy to rescue but ill equipped to affect sweeping behavioral changes or reform in an evil society. Abraham hoped there might be a small group of righteous people (Lot's extended family?) among the wicked, but there were not ten righteous to be found. "Abraham realized he could do no more. The case was closed. The verdict had been decided."⁹⁹

God destroys the cities only after confirming less than ten righteous inhabitants, a number echoing the minimal number of righteous saved from the Flood. Yet God spares Abraham's nephew Lot and Lot's two daughters, perhaps *both* because God is merciful to Lot (Genesis 19:16, 19:19) and because God remembers Abraham (19:29).¹⁰⁰ Lot may not necessarily be spared because he is completely innocent, but by the intercession and implicit concern of his righteous uncle Abraham who undoubtedly remembered Lot's dwelling in Sodom and yet did not explicitly mention this to God in attending to the wider issue of justice (Genesis 18:23-25).

Lot is never described as righteous in Genesis, but the fact that he is brought out from Sodom suggests he is relatively righteous compared with Sodom's other inhabitants.¹⁰¹ According to the New Testament, Lot showed righteousness by being distressed at the filthy lives of Sodom's residents and tormented in his soul, "by the lawless deeds he saw and heard" (2 Peter 2:7-8, NIV). Moreover, Lot shows courage by confronting the mob. "True to the cardinal principle of oriental hospitality that protecting your guests is a sacred duty, he bravely goes out...alone. The last clause, 'he shut the door behind him,' gives a clue to his thinking. By

shutting the door, he cut off his own escape and hoped to protect those inside.”¹⁰²

Lot’s dickering his daughters’ virginity to would-be gang rapists and the incestuous trickery his daughters later display by intoxicating Lot to copulate with him also raises skepticism about the extent Lot or his daughters can be considered righteous. John Walton tries to vindicate Lot through Lot’s petition, “Brothers, do not act so wickedly” (Genesis 19:7):

Is Lot truly offering his daughters to be gang-raped and probably murdered? An alternative is that his suggestion implies more subtle, ‘I would as soon have you violate my family members as violate those whom I have taken in and offered hospitality!...(Lot’s offer) is intended to prick the conscience of the mob. Just as they would (hopefully) not consider treating a citizen’s daughters in this way, so the same inhibitions should protect his guests.’¹⁰³

Christiana de Groot, however, takes another point of view:

Are there clues...to indicate if it was condoned or condemned by God? Here an assessment of Lot’s character is helpful. If Lot had been portrayed throughout...(as righteous), then his offer might be sanctioned by the narrator. However, Lot’s actions before and after this event show him to be self-centered. I suggest that *the narrator wants us to conclude that Lot is not one of the ten righteous whom the angels have sent to find* in Sodom and his action is not condoned...his action is understandable, given the practice of hospitality in the context of patriarchy, but it is neither excused nor applauded.¹⁰⁴

Unlike Abraham, Lot does not get to meet or talk with God face to face, but only with the Lord’s angelic attendants.¹⁰⁵ Before relocating to Sodom, Lot’s behavior with Abra(ha)m also exhibits little magnanimity. Lot in this instance is not a moral exemplar but a negative example:

Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herders and my herders; for we are kindred. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.” Lot looked about him, and saw that the plain of the

Jordan was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord...this was before the Lord had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward; thus they separated. (Genesis 13:8-11, NRSV)¹⁰⁶

Christiana de Groot sees Lot's selfishness vividly diverging from Abraham's generosity.¹⁰⁷ Abraham as the older uncle might have pre-empted the good land, but Abraham believes God's promise in Genesis 12:1-3 that he will finally receive the land God wants him to have.¹⁰⁸ Abraham later rescues Lot when Lot is taken prisoner by raiding armies, thereby interceding physically *and* spiritually for Lot, and for the king of Sodom in Genesis 14. de Groot also contrasts Abraham's and Lot's welcoming of the heavenly visitors:

The hospitality shown them by Abraham and Sarah functions as a foil to the inhospitable treatment they receive in Sodom. Lot compares favorably with his fellow citizens in Sodom but unfavorably with Abraham. When the angels come to Sodom, Lot...bows down to greet them. He invites them home with him to spend the night, wash and then continue their journey...He does not mention food or drink and is not deferential in his speech. The angels turn down his offer...(but) Lot becomes insistent, and they agree...Lot prepares a meal and bakes unleavened bread for them, (but) we do not have the impression of a whole household busy providing for guests as was the case in Abraham's hospitality.¹⁰⁹

Lot's character may be further despoiled by his rakish surroundings.¹¹⁰ Contra Dawkins, Sodom is not presented as "an intensely religious culture," but as an object lesson for sin.¹¹¹ Lot's betrothed sons-in-law, possibly motivated by attachment to Sodom, misperceive or ignore Lot and defiantly rebuff Lot's warning, "the Lord is about to destroy the city" (Genesis 19:14).

Nor does Lot fully escape judgment. After leaving Sodom, Lot was afraid (the text does not specify why) to stay in Zoar, the city he requested to flee from Sodom, living instead in a cave with his daughters (Genesis 19:30). Lot, who chose what he thought would be paradise in Genesis 13:10 ends up utterly destitute.¹¹² Lot, who earlier offered his daughters for sexual abuse, "ironically becomes the one who engages in such acts, but passively so. Lot becomes the passive sexual object he had determined his

daughters should become. The narrator thereby passes sharp judgment on Lot...his fate corresponds precisely to his earlier deed."¹¹³

This does not automatically excuse Lot's daughters, who may have residually "imbibed a love of Sodom and its attitudes."¹¹⁴ Lot's wife, daughters, and betrothed sons-in-law are all unnamed in Genesis, and their anonymity may imply censure. Although censure is not the only conceivable explanation for anonymity, it makes sense also with Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39 and contrasts with many major and minor female characters who are named in Genesis: Eve (Genesis 1-4), Adah wife of Lamech (4:19-23), Zillah (4:19-23), Namah (4:19-23), Milcah (11:29, 22:20-23, 24:15-47), Sarai/Sarah (17-18, 20-21, 23-25, 49), Hagar (16, 21, 25), Rebekah (24-29, 35, 49), Keturah (25), Judith (26:34), Basemath (26:34, 36:3-17), Mahalath (28:9), Rachel (29-31, 33, 35, 46, 48), Leah (29-31, 33-35, 46, 49), Bilhah (29-30, 35, 37, 46), Zilpah (29-30, 35, 37, 46), Dinah (30, 34, 46), Adah wife of Esau (36:6-16), Oholibamah (36:2-41), Timnah (38:12-14), Mehetabel (36:39), Tamar (14, 38), and Asenath (41, 46).

A more sympathetic option for Lot's daughters is that they are primordial sufferers of PTSD traumatized by carnage and isolation. They fear they have no prospective husbands to carry on the family line as is custom "all over the earth" (19:30). Levenson hints that after they witness so much destruction, they (deliriously?) infer they and their father are the last people alive, like Noah's family post-Flood, stranded in a cave rather than the proverbial desert island.¹¹⁵

Lot's daughters take initiative to continue the family line given that their options were "narrowed to a single one."¹¹⁶ Their actions from this point of view are, "heroism on a grand scale."¹¹⁷ Even though readers will be repulsed perchance intentionally by the author of Genesis, this slant on Lot's daughters softens their indiscretion.¹¹⁸ Their incest is an ancestral account for the Moabites and Ammonites, two intermittently troublesome neighbors for ancient Israel.¹¹⁹

Lot's wife mirrors Lot's irresoluteness. Although Lot's whole family must be hastened from Sodom in Genesis 19:16, only Lot's wife lingers or "looks back" to the point of death.¹²⁰ She intentionally rebuffs the heavenly visitors' warning, perhaps betraying an inner longing not to leave Sodom and its evil way of life even after God ostensibly delayed judgment for their flight to Zoar. The nature of the cataclysm could explain the salt pillar, if she was engulfed in fallout and chemicals or covered in salt. Human-shaped salt pillars are still found in the area.¹²¹

Pulling together strands in the Lot narrative exposes multiple threads. Instead of an earth-drenching flood, there is a localized trial by fire of two incorrigibly debased cities that contain not even ten righteous inhabitants. The cities' citizens wantonly endeavor to gang rape visitors rather than graciously hosting them as exemplified by Abraham and to a lesser degree by Lot. Lot, the nephew of the righteous intercessor Abraham, extends requisite hospitality to the visitors and tries to pacify the

mob by suggesting his virgin daughters (betrothed no less, perhaps with their fiancés in the mob!) as substitute sex objects.¹²² The heavenly messengers confound the lecherous crowd and rescue Lot's immediate family, instructing them, "Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away" (Genesis 19:17). Lot's wife tarries and becomes a pillar of salt, presumably a visual description of natural phenomena that killed her. Lot and his daughters are spared, but Lot is judged when his daughters desperately fulfill what they see as the vital task of perpetuating the family line.

Dawkins' aside is inadvertently apropos, "If this dysfunctional family was the best Sodom had to offer by the way of morals, some might begin to feel a certain sympathy with God and his judicial brimstone."¹²³ As with Noah among all flesh, Abraham's righteousness and even Lot and Lot's daughters' dubious coping and copulating strategies accentuate the colossal depravity of Sodom and God's justice in destroying it.

Rather than embodying "appalling" morality, the moral acuity of God represented in Genesis ingeniously orchestrates multiple objectives: 1) justice for those who cry out against Sodom and Gomorrah, 2) lesser judgment on Lot (and Lot's daughters?), 3) warning Lot's wife against the danger of demise which she fails to heed; 4) testing Abraham's integrity, and 5) modeling and honoring Abraham's plea for justice. God coordinates a "targeted approach" demonstrating a nuanced integrity that even "our limited" human perspective can marvel.¹²⁴

Conclusion

God in Genesis 1-11 and 19 exercises extraordinary acumen in relating to Abraham, Lot, Noah, and "all flesh" (Genesis 6:11, 9:5) in ways resonating with the prophet Jeremiah, "O LORD Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind" (Jeremiah 11:20, NIV) and the Apostle Paul, "Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God" (1 Corinthians 4:4, NRSV). As Indian philosopher Ravi Zacharias reflected, "Abraham asked God in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah whether he was going to let the righteous die with the unrighteous, and it was wonderful how Abraham answered his own question." Abraham said, "Will not the judge of all the earth do right" (Genesis 18:25)? Zacharias concludes this means, "we can be absolutely confident that whatever God does...he will do what is right."¹²⁵

The New Atheists' disapproving and suspicious hermeneutic of Genesis 1-11 and 19 is "weighed in the scales and found wanting" (Daniel 5:27, NRSV) by a more rigorous examination of the passages in question and a thorough review of scholarly literature on Genesis. In their irresponsible mockery of Genesis 1-11 and 19, and their less than targeted

judgmentalism toward God as an allegedly easy target in Genesis, the New Atheists are hoisted by their own petards.¹²⁶

Notes:

¹ I am grateful to Karen DeVan, Jon D. Levenson, Randy Maddox, Robert J. Song, David A. Wilkinson, and Mary Ruth Windham for comments on an earlier draft of this paper. For topics related to this article in earlier issues of *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, see Benjamin B. DeVan, "Is God a Monster? Nuanced Divine and Human Morality in Hebrew Scriptures," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* vol. 10 issue 30, (2011): 383-389; Micrea Leabu, "Christianity and Bioethics. Seeking Arguments for Stem Cell Research in Genesis," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* vol. 11 Issue 31 (Spring, 2012): 72-97.

² Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Transworld Publishers and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006) was a *New York Times* hardcover bestseller forty-five weeks from 2006-2007 and paperback eighty-six weeks from 2008-2011. Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006) was a bestseller seven weeks in 2006-2007. Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004) was a bestselling hardcover one week (September 2, 2004) and a bestselling paperback one-hundred weeks from 2005 to 2008. Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006) was a bestselling hardcover twenty-seven weeks from 2006-2007 and paperback seven weeks in 2008. Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010) was a hardcover bestseller five weeks in 2010. Sam Harris, *Free Will* (New York: Free Press, 2012) was a paperback bestseller six weeks in March-April 2012. Christopher Hitchens, *Arguably: Essays by Christopher Hitchens* (New York: Twelve, 2011) was a hardcover bestseller twelve weeks from September 2011 to February 2012. Christopher Hitchens, *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007) was a hardcover bestseller thirty-two weeks from 2007-2008 and paperback thirty-two weeks from April 2009-March 2012. Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch 22: A Memoir* (New York: Twelve, 2010) was a hardcover bestseller eleven weeks in 2010 and paperback two weeks in January 2012.

³ Harris holds a Ph.D. in neuroscience from UCLA. Hitchens completed undergraduate studies at Oxford in philosophy, politics, and economics. Dennett is Austin B. Fletcher Professor of Philosophy and co-director for the Center of Cognitive Studies at Tufts University. Dawkins was once Assistant Professor of Zoology at UC-Berkeley, and later Charles Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University (1995-2008).

⁴ David P. Barash, "The DNA of Religious Faith," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 20, 2007, 6, <http://chronicle.com/article/The-DNA-of-Religious-Faith/26321>, apparently first applied the Biblically derived "Four Horsemen." Dawkins claimed *The God Delusion* had sold over two million English copies by January 27, 2010 (7:27 p.m.), comment 3 #455619, "The God Delusion – Back on the Times Extended List at #24," The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, comment posted January 27, 2010, <http://richarddawkins.net/articles/5000#455619> (accessed May 30, 2012).

- ⁵ Michael Behe, "The Time 100: Richard Dawkins," *Time*, May 3, 2007, http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/time100/article/0,28804,1595326_1595329_1616137,00.html.
- ⁶ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 31; cf. Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 107.
- ⁷ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 31, 54.
- ⁸ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 237.
- ⁹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 237-238, parentheses in original.
- ¹⁰ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 238, 375-376; cf. Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986, 1996), 225, 241; Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 100, 107, 268-270, 282-283; Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 31, 33, 160; Richard Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1998), 198.
- ¹¹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 230; cf. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 47, 49, 52-54.
- ¹² Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 239; cf. Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 2: Genesis 16-50* (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 2:42-45, 59-60, for parallels and contrasts between Lot and Noah.
- ¹³ Genesis 19:7-8, quoted by Dawkins in *The God Delusion*, 240.
- ¹⁴ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 240, parenthesis added.
- ¹⁵ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 240.
- ¹⁶ Richard Dawkins, "Light Will Be Thrown," in *A Devil's Chaplain* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 61, originally published as the foreword to *The Descent of Man: Student Edition* (London: Gibson Square Books, 2002). Cf. Richard Dawkins, "Atheists for Jesus," in *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever*, ed. Christopher Hitchens (Philadelphia: De Capo, 2007), 309; Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, ii, xiv, 230, 241, 248, 251, 287; Richard Dawkins, *Climbing Mount Improbable* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 3, 307; Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 66-67, 113, 117, 119, 122, 125, 127, 129-133, 211; Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, 5, 100, 214-215, 404, 431; Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow*, 1; Christopher Hitchens, *Letters to a Young Contrarian* (New York: Basic Books, 2001, 2005), 24, 66. Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow*, 21, 190, 316, Dawkins refers to Barbara Ehrenreich and Janet McIntosh, "The New Creationism: Biology Under Attack," *The Nation*, June 9, 1997, <http://cogweb.ucla.edu/Debate/Ehrenreich.html>.
- ¹⁷ Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, 4, cf. 8, 9, 436.
- ¹⁸ Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, 7; cf. Dawkins, "Atheists for Jesus," 309; Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow*, 20, 183; Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice* (New York: Verso, 1995), 97.
- ¹⁹ Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, 155, 416.
- ²⁰ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 285.
- ²¹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 341, cf. 340-344, parenthesis added.
- ²² Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, 411, cf. 23; Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 375-376; Dawkins, *River Out of Eden*, 33, 46, 59, 161.
- ²³ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 2.
- ²⁴ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 2, "This is a good and necessary mental and literary training;" cf. Hitchens, *Hitch 22*, 102, "Training in logic chopping and Talmudic-style micro-exegesis can come in handy in later life."

²⁵ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 52; cf. Christopher Hitchens and Douglas Wilson, *Is Christianity Good for the World? A Debate* (Moscow: Canon Press, 2008), 14, 23; Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, 432; Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 61, 263. For sample New Atheist allegations that religion constitutes or exceeds the evils of child abuse, cf. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 349-387; Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 256; Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 217-228; Bethany Saltman, "The Temple of Reason: Sam Harris on How Religion Puts the World at Risk," *The Sun* 369, September, 2006,

http://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/369/the_temple_of_reason.

²⁶ Hitchens, *Letters to a Young Contrarian*, 108.

²⁷ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 99, parenthesis added, cf. 3-4, 8-10, 52, 54, 78, 81, 85-87, 90, 106, 249, 269, 282; Hitchens, *Letters to a Young Contrarian*, 108; Christopher Hitchens, *Love, Poverty, and War: Journeys and Essays* (New York: Nation Books, 2004), 58-59, 324; Hitchens, *The Missionary Position*, 97; Christopher Hitchens, *Unacknowledged Legislation: Writers in the Public Sphere* (New York: Verso, 2000), xvi, 271, 337.

²⁸ Hitchens, *Love, Poverty, and War*, 324.

²⁹ Hitchens, *Unacknowledged Legislation*, xvi.

³⁰ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 107, cf. 85; Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 5, 191-193; Harris, *The End of Faith*, 36.

³¹ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 98.

³² Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 88-89, cf. 123.

³³ Exodus 16:1-35; Numbers 11:6-9; Deuteronomy 8:3-16; Joshua 5:12; Nehemiah 9:20; Psalm 78:24; John 6:31-58; Hebrews 9:4; Revelation 2:17.

³⁴ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, 30th anniversary edition, 2006), 181.

³⁵ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 103; cf. Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens, *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (New York: Verso, 2001), 166.

³⁶ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 104, cf. 105-107, 129. Hitchens in *Thomas Paine's Rights of Man* (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2006), 128, cf. 31, 96, 132, ironically criticizes Paine's knowledge and apprehension of Genesis.

³⁷ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 106.

³⁸ Hitchens and Said, *Blaming the Victims*, 165.

³⁹ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 206-207; cf. Hitchens, *Thomas Paine's Rights of Man*, 137.

⁴⁰ Cf. Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 24-25.

⁴¹ Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 18, insinuates MIT linguist Noam Chomsky is a "crypto-creationist," cf. 67, 390; Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, 214-215, 404; Daniel C. Dennett, *Brainchildren: Essays on Designing Minds* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 189; Daniel C. Dennett, *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (Cambridge: MIT, 1981), xi; Daniel C. Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge: MIT, 1987), 285-286, 300; Maxwell Bennett et al., *Neuroscience and Philosophy: Brain, Mind, and Language* (New York: Columbia University, 2007), 206.

⁴² *Breaking the Spell*, 210, parenthesis in original; cf. *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 67; Harris, *The End of Faith*, 19.

⁴³ Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 61, italics in original.

⁴⁴ Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 516, cf. 263, parenthesis added; Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, 432; Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 52.

⁴⁵ Daniel C. Dennett, *Content and Consciousness (International Library of Philosophy) 2nd Edition* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, 1986), 18; Daniel C. Dennett, *Freedom Evolves* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 186.

⁴⁶ Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 96. Cf. Walter Moberly, "How Should One Read the Early Chapters of Genesis?," in *Reading Genesis After Darwin*, ed. Stephen C. Barton and David Wilkinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10-12.

⁴⁷ Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, xi.

⁴⁸ Harris, *The End of Faith*, 47.

⁴⁹ Harris, *The End of Faith*, 47; cf. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 48.

⁵⁰ Cf. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 237.

⁵¹ Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 34, cf. 149-150, 176, 235; Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 71-72.

⁵² Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 75-76.

⁵³ Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 71; cf. Hitchens, *Letters to a Young Contrarian*, 108.

⁵⁴ Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 49, parenthesis added, cf. 74-75 for a similar vignette regarding viruses.

⁵⁵ Contributors to Barton and Wilkinson, 6-7, 25-28, 32, 79-80, 130, cf. 39-55 cite various approaches to Genesis by historic Christian writers such as Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, St. Augustine, and John Calvin. Cf. Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), esp. 145-158, and Galatians 4:22-26 for a New Testament allegorical interpretation of the Sarah and Hagar stories in Genesis 16 and 20. See also Andrew Louth, ed., *Genesis 1-11: Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Old Testament I* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001); Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed* 2:25, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/gfp/index.htm>; Jacob Neusner, *Confronting Creation: How Judaism Reads Genesis An Anthology of Genesis Rabbah* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 25-27, 39; Sol Scharfstein, *Torah and Commentary The Five Books of Moses: Translation, Rabbinic and Contemporary Commentary* (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing House, 2008), 35; Mark Sheridan, ed., *Genesis 12-50: Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Old Testament II* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002). For mainstream Biblical scholarship, cf. Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 9, 38; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Treasures Old and New: Essays in the Theology of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 85; Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 11; David M. Carr, "Genesis," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Third Edition*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 10; George Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature The Forms of the Old Testament Literature* Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); David W. Cotter, *Genesis (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry)* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 4; Marva J. Dawn, *In the Beginning, God: Creation, Culture, and the Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2009), 15-26, 35-39, 46, 62-63, 65, 79, 119; Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in Abingdon Press, *The New Interpreter's Bible Vol. 1*

of 12: *General & Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 324-325; Walter C. Kaiser et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 88; Naomi Steinberg, "The Genealogical Framework of the Family Stories in Genesis," *Semeia* 46 (1989): 144; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), e.g. 6, 18, 80. Also cf. and contrast Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament) Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 56-58; Susan Niditch, "Genesis," in *Women's Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992, 1999), 14; John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis (The International Critical Commentary) 2nd Edition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark and New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910, 1934), iv-xlii, 90-98, 111-114, 173-181; Bruce Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 33-34; Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 1: Genesis 1-15* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 1:52, 1:159-163. One scholar who sees Genesis as literally true is Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26 (The New American Commentary Volume 1A)* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 109-111; cf. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-56:26 (The New American Commentary Volume 1B)* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 25-41; Hamilton, 53.

⁵⁶ Pope John Paul II, "Cosmology and Fundamental Physics," October 3, 1981, EWTN Global Catholic Network, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/jp2cosm.htm>; cf. Brueggemann, 24, 25; Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, ed., *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (New York: URJ Press, 2008), 5; Jon D. Levenson, "Genesis," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8; Stephen Pope, "Editorial: The Legacy of John Paul II on Science and Theology," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 1:2 (June, 2005): 1-5; Waltke and Fredricks, 73-78; John H. Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 36-39, 42-49.

⁵⁷ Richard Clifford, "The Hebrew Scriptures and the Theology of Creation," *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 508-512, parenthesis added.

⁵⁸ Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 69; cf. Alter, 7; Barnabe Assohoto and Samuel Ngewa, "Genesis," in *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 10-11; Brueggemann, 29; Carr, 11; John Calvin, *Genesis*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/commentaries>; Ignacio Nunez de Castro, "Image of God for an Evolutionary Universe," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 2:2 (June, 2006): 4-5; Cotter, 9-10, 16; Eskazi, 2; Mathews, 1A:29-30, 86-102, 115, 130; Unaegbu Patrick, "Re-appreciating and Re-appropriating the Integrity of Creation in the Light of the Resurrection of Jesus," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 4:2 (June, 2008): 81; Dan Sandu, "Eastern Orthodox Theology and Practices Related to Ecological Issues," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 1:2 (June, 2005): 35-36; Nahum M. Sarna, ed., *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 3; John Wesley, *Notes on the Old Testament*, Genesis 1:1, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/notes>; Skinner, 16-17; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis - A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1972), 46; Waltke and Fredricks, 59. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 26-69, 80, 163-164; Ronald Youngblood,

"Genesis," in *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker (Grand Rapids, MI, 1985, 2008), 6.

⁵⁹ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 59, 66, 67, 68, 100; David Wilkinson, *The Message of Creation: Encountering the Lord of the Universe (The Bible Speaks Today Series)* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 24; Wenham, 1:10; cf. Brueggemann, 29; Fox, 9, 13; Richard E. Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (New York: HarperOne, 2003), 5; Frethiem, 341; David Wilkinson, "Genesis 1-3 in the Light of Modern Science," in Barton and Wilkinson, 138.

⁶⁰ de Groot in Catherine Clark Kroeger, and Mary J. Evans (eds.), *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 1; Kaiser, 89; cf. Sarna, xvi-xviii; Hamilton, 1:56-70; Mathews, 1A:24-44.

⁶¹ Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 61, italics in original.

⁶² E.g. Francisco J. Ayala, *Darwin's Gift: To Science and Religion* (Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2007); Francis Collins, *The Language of God*; Dawn, 67-68; Michael Dowd, *Thank God for Evolution: How the Marriage of Science and Religion will Transform Your Life and Our World* (New York: Viking, 2007); Karl W. Giberson, *Saving Darwin: How to Be a Christian and Believe in Evolution* (New York: HarperOne, 2008); Dennis O. Lamoureux, *I Love Jesus & I Accept Evolution* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009); Kenneth R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999); Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution and Christian Faith: Reflections of an Evolutionary Biologist: What Jesus and Darwin Have in Common* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2006); and atheist philosopher Michael Ruse, *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian? The Relationship between Science and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Cf. de Castro, 3-9; Manuel G. Doncel, "The Kenosis of the Creator, His Creative Call and the Co-Creators," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 2:4 (December, 2006): 5-13; Patrick, 79-81; Jose M. Romero-Baro, "God's Mark on Nature: A Trinitarian Approach," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 4:1 (March, 2008): 27-42; Magda Stavinschi, "Science and Religion in Romania," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 1:3 (September, 2005), 27-33. Barton and Wilkinson, xi, cf. 128, describe *The God Delusion* on Genesis "naïve and simplistic." Mathews, 1A:102-109, disagrees with theistic evolution but evaluates it sympathetically.

⁶³ As argued or described by Gleason L. Archer, *New Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 55-70, 82-84; Walter L. Bradley, "Why I Believe the Bible is Scientifically Reliable," in *Why I am a Christian: Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. Norman L. Geisler and Paul K. Hoffman (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001, 2006), 175-196; Richard F. Carlson, ed., *Science and Christianity: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000); Carr, 20; Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 30-35; Hamilton, 1:53-54; Kaiser, 112-114; Moberly, 12; J.P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds (eds.), *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999); Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator: A Journalist Investigates Scientific Evidence that Points to God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); Walton, 321-330; Wilkinson, 17-77, 170-180; Youngblood, 15.

⁶⁴ Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 17; cf. Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler* (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

⁶⁵ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 166-167, without citing his source(s) alludes to early Mormons supposedly alluding to "descendants of Ham," an implicit reference to

Genesis 9. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 45, links apartheid with “religion,” but not explicitly to Genesis. Cf. Kenneth Kuelman, ed., *Critical Moments in Religious History* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1993), 169-170; David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), esp. 141-192.

⁶⁶ Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, 4.

⁶⁷ C.S. Lewis, quoted in Douglas Wilson, *The Deluded Atheist* (Powder Springs: American Vision, 2008), 56.

⁶⁸ Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 96.

⁶⁹ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 88-89, cf. 123.

⁷⁰ Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 88.

⁷¹ Colin Humphreys, *The Miracles of Exodus: A Scientist's Discovery of the Extraordinary Natural Causes of the Bible Stories* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 246.

⁷² Humphreys, 5, parenthesis added.

⁷³ Sarna, 138; cf. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50 (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Skinner, 311; E.A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 142; Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 128-130; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1985), 306; Youngblood, 36.

⁷⁴ Fretheim, 383-38; von Rad, 117; cf. Cotter, 54-55; Scharfstein, 44, 47; Skinner, 150-151.

⁷⁵ Fretheim, 389-392, first two parentheses added; cf. Assohoto and Ngewa, 21-22; Brueggemann, 81; Calvin, Genesis 6:5-7; Carr, 19-20; Cotter, 53; Eskanazi, 26, 38; Fox, 33; Friedman, 36; Geisler and Howe, 41; Hamilton, 1:274-276; Louth, 127-129; Mathews, 1A:128, 339-344; Patrick, 85-89; Sarna, 47-49, 51; von Rad, 117-188; Waltke and Fredricks, 127; Wesley, Genesis 6:5-13; Wilkinson, 172. Dean Koontz, *The Taking* (New York: Bantam, 2004) and Madeleine L'Engle, *Many Waters* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986) are bestselling fictional retellings of the Noahic Flood or events surrounding it.

⁷⁶ See David John Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11: The Dawn of Creation (Bible Speaks Today)* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 136; Calvin, Genesis 6:11; Fox, 34; Friedman, 36; Hamilton, 1:278-279; Derek Kidner, *Genesis (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967, 1981), 87; Mathews, 1A:339, “Collectively, (pre-Flood) society has already decayed beyond recovery in God's estimation” (parenthesis added), cf. 345; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 408-410; Waltke and Fredricks, 134; Wilkinson, 172.

⁷⁷ Assohoto and Ngewa, 21; cf. Brueggman, 83; Friedman, 36, “on earth” (6:12) means land animals, “Sadly, in the current era, we are corrupting the sea (and the sky, and space) as well;” Louth, 128; Mathews, 1A:340, 345; Neusner, 122-124; Patrick, 82-85; Sandu, 36-38; von Rad, 131, “humanity relating to animals no longer resembles the decree in Genesis 1;” Wesley, Genesis 6:7, 6:12; Waltke and Fredricks, 119, As the ground endure sin's consequences (Genesis 3:17), so do the animals; Youngblood, 15. Contrast Wenham, 159, “all flesh” as humanity; Rashi, *Bereishis*, Genesis 6:6, 6:11, <http://www.tachash.org/texis/vtx/chumash>, on animal corruption; cf. Hamilton, 1:276-279; Louth, 92; Skinner, 159.

⁷⁸ Cf. Brueggemann, 76-77; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 409-410, 417; Wilkinson, 172.

⁷⁹ Rashi, Genesis 7:12; Neusner, 132.

⁸⁰ Rashi, Genesis 7:12; Neusner, 132; cf. 1 Peter 3:19; Calvin, Genesis 6:5; Fox, 33; Sarna, 133; Scharfstein, 45. Waltke and Fredricks, 271, sees similar forbearance by God with Sodom and Gomorrah.

⁸¹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 239. Cf. Brueggemann, 79; Calvin, Genesis 6:9; Hamilton, 1:275-277; Hebrews 11:7; Kaiser, 110-111; Neusner, 131-140; Sarna, 54; Scharfstein, 45; Waltke and Fredricks, 123-124, 133; Walton, 311; Wesley, Genesis 6:8-9; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 411-412; Youngblood, 15. See Cotter, 61, on the Midrash, Jerome, and Augustine on Noah's comparative but not perfect righteousness. Mathews, 1A:345-347, 356-259, 359-370, compares divinely "favored" Noah with Abraham. Wenham, 1:170, "This phrase (walked with God, Ge 6:9) puts Noah on a par with Enoch (Ge 5:22, 24) the only other named individual to have walked with God. Abraham, Isaac and godly kings 'walked before' God (Ge 17:1, 48:15, 2 Kg 20:3)...there is a progressive build-up in Noah's characterization: he was a good man...blameless...Finally, he walked with God like Enoch, the only man in Genesis...translated to heaven...Noah's character stands out even more brightly against...the rest of humanity" (first parenthesis added).

⁸² Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 238.

⁸³ Fox, 34, parenthesis in original; cf. Blenkinsopp, 85-101; Carr, 19; Robert A. Di Vito, "The Demarcation of the Divine and Human Realms in Genesis 2-11," in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions (Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series)*, ed. Richard J. Clifford (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992), 39-56; Eskanazi, 38; Hamilton, 1:274, 2:22; Mathews, 1A:100, 118-122, 128, 339-340; von Rad, 118, 122-125; Wenham, 1:165-166; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 398-405; Youngblood, 15.

⁸⁴ Fretheim, 393, cf. 401.

⁸⁵ Fretheim, 392-395; cf. Brueggemann, 83, 85-86; Friedman, 40-42; Levenson, "Genesis," 23; Mathews, 1A, 382; Neusner, 140-141; Rashi, Genesis 8:1; von Rad, 128; Waltke and Fredricks, 140.

⁸⁶ Brueggemann, 83, 88; Fretheim, 394; cf. Moberly, 12; Donald E. Gowan, *From Eden to Babel: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1-11* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 92; Levenson, "Genesis," 24; Mathews, 1A:350-351; Patrick, 81; von Rad, 130; Walton, 72-74; Wenham, 1:15-16; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 393.

⁸⁷ Cf. von Rad, 131.

⁸⁸ Cf. Fretheim, 395.

⁸⁹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 238.

⁹⁰ "Innocent," in Alter, 89; cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Abraham and the Righteous of Sodom," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982): 122; Levenson, "Genesis," 40; Hamilton, 2:15-16; Mathews, 1B:228-230; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 291-292, 293, Abraham "receive(s) from God...confirmation of the divine righteousness against any possible doubt."

⁹¹ Fox, 74; cf. Benno Jacob, *Das erste Book der Tora* (New York: Ktav, 1934, 1974), 448-449, "God himself, who wants intercession made, and Abraham must be the intercessor;" Calvin, Genesis 18:19-20; Walton, 475, 482; Wesley, Genesis 19:22, "the very presence of good men in a place helps to keep off judgments. See what care God takes for the preservation of his people!"

⁹² Sarna, 131; and Hamilton, 2B:17; cf. Mathews, 1B:227; Waltke and Fredricks, 270, "Abraham the great host is also Abraham the compassionate prophet who

intercedes and upholds justice;" cf. Hamilton, 2:19-20; Walton, 482; Wenham 2:52-53. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 286-287 and Mathews, 1B:228 compare Abraham with Job.

⁹³ Levenson, "Genesis," 39; Friedman, 65; cf. Ronald Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 38-39; Wesley, Genesis 18:23, "Abraham drew near - This expression intimates, A holy concern. A holy confidence; he drew near with an assurance of faith, drew near as a prince, Job xxxi, 37."

⁹⁴ Fretheim, 478.

⁹⁵ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 237; cf. Carr, 35; Genesis 11, 18:17-19; Mathews, 1B:222-224, 228, 230; Hamilton, 2:18.

⁹⁶ Sarna, 132, cf. 133; Cotter, 119-120; Fretheim, 468; Hamilton, 2:21, 40; Mathews, 1B:224-225; von Rad, 211; Waltke and Fredricks, 281; Wenham, 2:50; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 301. Speiser, 133, 140, uses "outcry" and "outrage" to describe Sodom's wickedness. Youngblood, 34 translates, "a cry of righteous indignation;" cf. Matthew 25:31-46.

⁹⁷ Wenham, 2:50.

⁹⁸ Cf. 2 Peter 3:9, NRSV, "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance;" Assahoto and Ngewa, 38-39; Calvin, Genesis 13:13, 18:20-21; Rashi, Genesis 18; Sarna, 133; Sheridan, 71; Waltke and Fredricks, 271; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 72, 291.

⁹⁹ Scharfstein, 68; cf. Carr, 36; Hamilton, 2B:25-26; Skinner, 405, "fifty...a small number in a city, but yet sufficient to produce misgiving if they should perish unjustly;" Walton, 482-483, 485-488; Wesley, Genesis 18:30, 33; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 292. Youngblood, 35, Abraham stops at ten, projecting the number in Lot's family.

¹⁰⁰ Fretheim, 475; cf. Fox, 35; Scharfstein, 70; Wesley, Genesis 19:29; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 308, the precise equivalent of Genesis. 8:1, "then God remembered Noah." God remembers Lot (in part) for the sake of Abraham?

¹⁰¹ Wenham, 2:42, parenthesis added.

¹⁰² Wenham, 2:55-2:56; cf. Calvin, Genesis 19:2, 19:6. Carr, 36-37, Lot like Noah may 'find favor' (Genesis 19:19), but contrast Lot's lingering with Noah's immediate obedience. Lot is an immigrant, but well-appointed houses were protected by solid, costly doors; cf. Speiser, 139; Waltke and Fredricks, 276; Walton, 483; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 301.

¹⁰³ Walton, 477, parentheses added. Contrast Judges 9:24-25 where a substitute in a different setting is actually given to a mob; cf. Hamilton, 2:38; Mathews, 1B:231-232, 236; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 300-302.

¹⁰⁴ de Groot, 14-15, italics in original, parenthesis added; cf. Carr, 38; Cotter, 123; Friedman, 66-67; Geisler and Howe, 48-49; Mathews, 1B:236-237; von Rad, 218; Waltke and Fredricks, 276-277, 282, for Lot's possible deliberations; Wesley, Genesis 19:8.

¹⁰⁵ Genesis 19:1, Levenson, "Genesis," 40; cf. Sheridan, 73.

¹⁰⁶ Neusner, 170; cf. Rashi, Genesis 13; Walton, 415; Wenham, 1:297-298, "Eastward" describes his (Lot's) direction of travel, but it may echo Adam, Eve, and Cain, who went east after sinning (3:24, 4:16), and the men of Babel who

journeyed 'in the east' before commencing their ill-fated tower (11:2)." Contrast Speiser, 98.

¹⁰⁷ de Groot, 14; cf. Assahoto and Ngewa, 31; Calvin, Genesis 13:9-10; Carr, 29; Cotter, 114-118, 122-124; Fox, 78; Fretheim, 434. Hamilton, 1:391-392, notes Abraham's generosity is an example that his son Isaac imitates in Genesis 26. Mathews, 1B:130-131, compares Lot with Esau, 134-135, 236, and Lot's quarrelling as ungratefulness to Abraham; cf. Levenson, "Genesis," 33; Speiser, 143; von Rad, 171; Waltke and Fredricks, 221-222, 266; Wenham, 1:300-301. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 177, adds, "Abraham...is responsible for his family and people and must come to a decision that has in view the life and well-being of his group" (cf. 178, 181). Cotter, 93-94, 122-123. Waltke and Fredricks, 274, following Coates, calls Lot in Genesis a "bungler and buffoon;" cf. Youngblood, 36.

¹⁰⁸ Brueggemann, 130; cf. Youngblood, 27.

¹⁰⁹ de Groot, 14, parenthesis added; cf. Assahoto and Ngewa, 38; Fretheim, 473-474; Genesis 18-19; Hamilton, 2:5-6, 28, 32-33, 56; Levenson, "Genesis," 33, 39, 41; Mathews, 1B:234-235; Rashi, Genesis 19; Youngblood, 33; but contrast Sarna, 135-135; Scharfstein, 69; Sheridan, 74-75; Waltke and Fredricks, 273-274; Wenham, 2:45-47, 2:54-55; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 277-278, sees Abraham first unaware of his visitors' identity; cf. Assahoto and Ngewa, 36; Hamilton, 2:3, 8-9. Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 42, contrasts Abraham, Lot, and Lot's immediate family.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Assahoto and Ngewa, 38; Fretheim, 434; Neusner, 170-171; Wenham, 1:261.

¹¹¹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 240; David Marshall, *The Truth Behind the New Atheism: Responding to the Emerging Challenges to God and Christianity* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2007), 97.

¹¹² Assahoto and Ngewa, 39, Lot is afraid, "possibly because people might blame him for what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah." Sarna, 139, "Perhaps earth tremors continued to be felt there. Later Jewish Sources have preserved a tradition that all five cities—including Zoar—were destroyed. This would explain why Lot's daughters believed the catastrophe to be universal." Sarna, 360, references Wisdom Of Solomon 10:6, Josephus, *Wars*, 4.484, Genesis Rabbah 42:8, 51:6; cf. 57:10, Rashi, Rashbam, Bekhor Shor, and others. Wenham compares Abraham's altruistic intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah with Lot's selfish request regarding Zoar. With Abraham, "The Lord promises to spare the place if some righteous are found in it (18:26)...(God) uses the same verb when telling Lot, 'I have granted your request' (19:21)" (2:42, parenthesis added, cf. 2:58) which indicates equivalent criteria in (initially) sparing Zoar. Cf. Hamilton, 2:44, 50-51; Mathews, 1B:244-245; Rashi, Genesis 18. Perhaps God wanted Lot to intercede for Zoar? Contrast Calvin, Genesis 19:21; Mathews, 1B:227, 240; Wesley, Genesis 18:30, "He was frightened out of Zoar...either because he was conscious to himself that it was a refuge of his own choosing (sic)...foolishly prescribed to God, and therefore could not but distrust his safety in it. Probably he found it as wicked as Sodom...concluded it could not long survive it; or perhaps he observed the rise and increase of those waters, which, after the conflagration, began to overflow the plain, and which, mixing with the ruins, by degrees made the dead sea...He was now glad to go to the mountain, the place which God had appointed for his shelter."

¹¹³ Fretheim, 47; cf. Alter, 92, 96; Assahoto and Ngewa, 39; Hamilton, 2:35-37, 51; Levenson, "Genesis," 41; Waltke and Fredricks, 280; Wenham, 2:60; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 315, Lot has a passive role also in Genesis 14.

¹¹⁴ Wenham, 2:59, parenthesis added. Cf. Mathews, 1B:244-245; Sarna, 140; Waltke and Fredricks, 279.

¹¹⁵ Levenson, "Genesis," 42, parenthesis added; Carr, 38; Eskanazi, 93; Falvius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston (Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com, nd), 1:23; Hamilton, 2:51; Rashi, Genesis 19:31; Speiser, 145. Contrast Calvin, Genesis 19:31; Fretheim, 476; Sarna, 140, "No way of knowing if their intent was the renewal of the entire human race, as Genesis Rabba 57:10 sees it, or just the perpetuation of their father's name;" cf. Walton, 481; Wenham, 2:61; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 311-313.

¹¹⁶ Fretheim 476; cf. Brueggemann, 176; Hamilton, 2:51; Mathews, 1B:245; Sarna, 134; von Rad, 223-224.

¹¹⁷ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 313, attributes without citing the source to, "B. Jacob...agreeing with H. Gunkel." Cf. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis: Third Edition*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1910, 1997), 217.

¹¹⁸ Per Hitchens revulsion in *god is not Great*, 206.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Calvin, Genesis 19:37; Cotter, 123; de Groot, 15, Eskanazi, 91, 93; Hamilton, 2:52-53-54; Mathews, 1B:131; Rashi, Genesis 19:37; Sarna, 139; Scharfstein, 72; Skinner, 314; Speiser, 145-146; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 312; Youngblood, 36. Contrast Mathews, 1B:244-246; Wenham, 2:62, "Despite the dubious origin of these near-neighbors, this was not held against them. Their territories were regarded as God-given (Deut 29:9, 19). Only Moab and Ammon's lack of hospitality to the Israelites on their way to Canaan prompted later animosity (Deut 23:4[3])." Walton, 485, "Moabites and Ammonites only...exist because the Lord has remembered Abraham."

¹²⁰ Speiser, 140, "Lot is...hesitant to abandon his possessions," cf. 143; Hamilton, 2:42-43; Luke 17:51-52; Wesley, Genesis 19:16-17; Youngblood, 36. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 303, pictures Lot's family dallying because they ironically feel more secure in the city. One can also conceive Lot more nobly motivated (in part?) as unwilling to abandon his future sons in law or others in remaining in Sodom.

¹²¹ See Genesis 19:16, 21-22; cf. Assahoto and Ngewa, 39; Calvin, Genesis 19:26; Carr, 37; Fretheim, 475; Hamilton, 2:48; Hamilton, 2B:40, 48; Josephus, *The Antiquities*, 1:23; Levenson, "Genesis," 42; Luke 17:32; Mathews, 1B:232-233, 242; Sarna 138; Scharfstein, 71; Sheridan, 78-79, 82; Skinner, 309-310; von Rad, 221-222; Wenham, 2:59; Wesley, Genesis 19:25-26; Youngblood, 36. Hamilton, 2:49, reads "looked back" as not literal, supported by Abraham looking from a distance at Sodom after its destruction (Genesis 19:27-28). Waltke and Fredricks, 274, 279, "The narrator does not explain the origin of Lot's wife. Possibly she was a resident of Sodom. Lot's wife vacillates, probably longing for what she has left behind, and experiences the fate of the city with which she identifies (Luke 17:32)." Walton, 479-480, argues "look back" is not literal but means, "Get out of here, don't turn back!" Wisdom of Solomon, "A pillar of salt stands as a memorial to an unbelieving soul" (10:4).

¹²² Cf. Genesis 19:14. Since the future sons-in-law likely reside in Sodom, and Sodom's residents "to the last man" surround Lot's house. Mathews, 1A:232-233, sees the sons-in-law as microcosms of the Sodomite men. In both cases, Lot

“Went out(side) the house to meet them (vv. 7, 14)...in both cases they reject Lot’s admonitions (vv. 9, 14).” At the Sodomites’ final opportunity to avert disaster, “they would not have anyone ‘play the judge’ (v. 9), an eerie echo of the erstwhile appellative, ‘Judge of all the earth’ (18:25).” Cf. Mathews, 1B:238-239; Hamilton, 2:41.

¹²³ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 241.

¹²⁴ Dawkins, 238, 239; Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 49.

¹²⁵ Ravi Zacharias, quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith*, 157.

¹²⁶ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 31, 237-240; Harris, *The End of Faith*, 47; Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 47-54; Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 206-207; cf. C.S. Lewis, “God in the Dock,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 240-244.

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