

‘ĀDĀM AS ‘SKIN’ AND ‘EARTH’:  
AN EXAMINATION OF SOME PROPOSED MEANINGS IN  
BIBLICAL HEBREW<sup>1</sup>

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The noun *’dm* appears in the lexicon of L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner with five separate listings for אָדָם.<sup>2</sup> In addition to (1) the common meaning of ‘humanity’; there is (2) the meaning of ‘skin, hide, leather’ given for an appearance of אָדָם in Hosea 11:4; (3) the personal name Adam; (4) the meaning of ‘ground, earth’, a variant of אֲדָמָה; and (5) the geographic name for a site identified with Tell ed-Dāmiye. While the first and third meanings are identifiable in the opening chapters of Genesis;<sup>3</sup> the second, fourth, and fifth are to be considered here in terms of their usefulness in understanding the texts in which they have been found and in terms of their value as additions to the Hebrew lexicon.

1. Meaning 2: ‘skin, hide, leather’

This meaning is based on the use of אָדָם in Hosea 11:4. The text of the first part of the verse reads:

בְּחִבְלֵי אָדָם אֶתְּשָׁבָם  
בְּעֶבְרֹת אֲהָבָה

G. R. Driver proposed the rendering: ‘I attached them (as) with bands of leather, drawing them (close as) with bonds of hide’.<sup>4</sup> He bases his translation on Arabic cognates for both אָדָם and אֲהָבָה. The JPS translation reads: ‘I drew them with human ties, With cords of love’. This is acceptable for the context. Although the lexicon of Koehler and Baumgartner cites H. W.

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<sup>2</sup>*Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament* (Lieferung I: א-ט), Leiden, E. J. Brill <sup>3</sup>(1967) 14.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Gen. 1-5 and my forthcoming article, ‘Splitting the Adam: The Usage of ‘ĀDĀM in Genesis i-v’, *Vetus Testamentum*.

<sup>4</sup>‘Linguistic and Textual Problems: Minor Prophets. I’, *JTS* 39 (1938) 154-66 [161].

Wolff, the latest edition of his commentary rejects 'leather' as a translation for אָדָם or אֶהְבֵּה.<sup>5</sup> Such an understanding is supported by the other commentaries, as well. The most common translation is to understand אָדָם as 'humanity' or as an individual human.<sup>6</sup> This is the simplest and most suitable reading of the text. However, even options to read חָסָד as an emendation in place of אָדָם<sup>7</sup> demonstrate an alternative view to אָדָם understood as 'skin, hide, leather'.

## 2. Meaning 4: 'ground, earth, steppe'

This meaning for אָדָם is suggested by its similarity to the Hebrew word for 'ground, earth', אֲדָמָה. The meaning is based upon M. Dahood's argument concerning the אָדָם of Zechariah 9:1.<sup>8</sup> Among the emendations proposed for this phrase was one

<sup>5</sup>Hosea. *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea* (trans. G. Stansell; Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Fortress 1974) 191, 199.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. K. Marti, *Das Dodekapropheten Erklärt* (KHAT XIII; Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 1904) 87; W. R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark 1936) 364; J. Mauchline, 'The Book of Hosea. Exegesis', in *The Interpreter's Bible*. VI (New York and Nashville, Abingdon 1956) 684, who appears to understand the RSV's 'cords of compassion' as a synonym for 'cords of a man'; W. Rudolph, *Hosea* (KAT XIII,1; Gütersloh, Gerd Mohn 1966) 208-10, who renders the phrase, 'Mit menschlichen Seilen zog ich sie, mit Stricken der Liebe'; J. L. Mays, *Hosea. A Commentary* (OTL; London, SCM 1969) 150, 154-5; F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24; Garden City, New York, Doubleday 1980) 574, 578-81, who join the first part of v. 3 with the first part of v. 4a, and translate, 'I was a guide for Ephraim. I took from his arms the bonds of men'; E. Zenger, "'Durch Menschen zog ich sie . . ." (Hos 11,4). Beobachtungen zum Verständnis des prophetischen Amtes im Hoseabuch', 183-201 in L. Ruppert, P. Weimar, E. Zenger (edd.) *Künder des Wortes. Beiträge zur Theologie der Propheten. Josef Schreiner zum 60. Geburtstag* (Würzburg, Echter 1982) 192-4; L. J. Wood, 'Hosea', in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with The New International Version of The Holy Bible* (Regency Reference Library; Grand Rapids, Zondervan 1985) 212.

<sup>7</sup>W. Nowack, *Die kleinen Propheten Übersetzt und Erklärt* (HKAT, III, 4; Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 21903) 70; E. Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch Übersetzt und Erklärt* (KAT XII; Leipzig and Erlangen, A. Deichert (W. Scholl) 1922) 86-7, on the basis of the parallelism in the context and the parallel text of Jeremiah 31:3; T. H. Robinson, 'Hosea bis Micha', in T. H. Robinson and F. Horst, *Die Zwölf kleinen Propheten* (HAT, erste Reihe, 14; Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 31964) 42.

<sup>8</sup>Zacharia 9,1, *EN 'ADĀM, CBQ* 25 (1963) 123-4. In addition to the passages discussed here, Dahood argues for this translation in Job 11:12 and Isaiah 38:11:

relating אָדָם to אֲדָמָה by adding a ה to the word. The translation would then be, 'surface of the earth'. Dahood accepted this translation but argued that no emendation was necessary since 'Hebrew possessed a masculine substantive 'ādām, "earth, steppe"'. Thus Dahood would translate Zechariah 9:1 as follows:

The word of the Lord is in Hadrach,  
And Damascus is his domicile;  
For the Lord's is the surface of the earth,  
As well as all the tribes of Israel.

However, this is not the only translation possible. Indeed, commentators have tended to understand אָדָם as an unemended geographic name (definition 5 of Koehler and Baumgartner's lexicon),<sup>9</sup> or as a slightly emended geographic name, אֲדָמָה.<sup>10</sup> In either case, the proposed translation of אָדָם as 'earth, steppe' is unnecessary. However, A. Lacocque argues for accepting the text as it is and translating אָדָם as 'humanity'.<sup>11</sup> His translation follows Dahood's except for the third line, which he renders:

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review of *The New English Bible* (Library Edition: Old Testament. Apocrypha; London, Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press 1970) in *Biblica* 52 (1971) 117-23 [118]; חֲרֵץ "Cessation" in Isaiah 38, 11', *Biblica* 52 (1971) 215-16; 'Hebrew Lexicography: A Review of W. Baumgartner's *Lexikon*, Volume II', *Orientalia* n.s. 45 (1976) 327-65 [360].

<sup>9</sup>E. Zolli, 'EYN 'ADĀM (Zach. IX 1)', VT 5 (1955) 90-2.

<sup>10</sup>Klostermann, review of C. J. Bredenkamp, *Der Prophet Sacharja Erklärt* (Erlangen, Deichert 1879), in TLZ 24 (1879) 561-7 [566]; Marti, *Dodekapropheten*, 427; E. Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch*, 495-7; R. C. Dentan, 'The Book of Zechariah. Chapters 9-14. Exegesis', in *The Interpreter's Bible*. VI (New York and Nashville, Abingdon 1956) 1093; F. Horst, 'Nahum bis Maleachi', in T. H. Robinson and F. Horst, *Die Zwölf kleinen Propheten* (HAT, erste Reihe, 14; Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 31964) 244; J. G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; London, Tyndale 1972) 159; W. Rudolph, *Haggai - Sacharja 1-8 - Sacharja 9-14 - Maleachi. Mit einer Zeittafel von Alfred Jepsen* (KAT XIII,4; Gütersloh, Gerd Mohn 1976) 166-7.

<sup>11</sup>'Zacharie 9-14', in S. Amsler, A. Lacocque, and R. Vuilleumier *Aggée, Zacharie 1-8, Zacharie 9-14, Malachie* (CAT XIc; Neuchâtel and Paris, Delachaux and Niestlé 1981) 127-216 [148]. Cf. also Nowack, *Die kleinen Propheten*, 388, who translates אָדָם as 'die Heiden', comparing its usage with that of Jeremiah 31:19; K. L. Barker, 'Zechariah', in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with The New International Version of The Holy Bible* (Regency Reference Library; Grand Rapids, Zondervan 1985) 656-8, 661.

'Car sur YHWH est l'œil de (tout) homme'.<sup>12</sup> Lacocque's case is supported by the versions and by the reference to eyes in v. 8.

Five other examples are also cited by Dahood. All appear in the lexicon of Koehler and Baumgartner. The first one is Proverbs 30:14b:

לֹאֵלֶל עֲנִיִּים מֵאֶרֶץ וְאֶדְיוֹנִים מֵאֶדָם

Dahood translates: 'To devour the poor from the land and the needy from the earth'.<sup>13</sup> However, it is possible to understand אֶדָם in this verse as 'humanity'. In this case, אֶרֶץ which is parallel to אֶדָם, should be understood as a poetic metaphor for humanity in general. This is preferable as the context is not concerned with the place of residence for the poor and needy (i.e. the earth), but with that portion of humanity which is least able to defend itself against the type of people described in vv. 11-14a.<sup>14</sup>

Genesis 16:12 contains the expression, פָּרָא אֶדָם, which Dahood translates as, 'a wild ass of the steppe'.<sup>15</sup> This translation has not been followed by the commentators who

<sup>12</sup>p. 148. Cf. JPS: 'For all men's eyes will turn to the LORD'; NIV: 'for the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on the LORD'; and M. Delcor, 'Les allusions à Alexandre le grande dans Zach IX 1-8', VT 1 (1951) 110-24 [112].

<sup>13</sup>Cf. M. Dahood, *Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Philology* (Rome, Pontificium Institutum Biblicum 1963) 57-8.

<sup>14</sup>The early commentators tended to preserve אֶדָם with the meaning, 'humanity'. Cf. F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon II* (trans., M. G. Easton; Clark's Foreign Theological Library, fourth series, XLVII, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark 1882) 284-6; C. H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (ICC; Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark 1904) 526-7. For more recent commentators who continue to follow this interpretation, cf. H. Ringgren, 'Sprüche Übersetzt und erklärt', in H. Ringgren and W. Zimmerli, *Sprüche/Prediger Übersetzt und erklärt* (ATD 16/1; Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1962) 115-16; B. Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos* (HAT, erste Reihe, 16; Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 21963) 104. Other recent commentators have chosen to emend אֶדָם to אֶדְיוֹנִים. Cf. G. Sauer, *Die Sprüche Agurs* (BWANT fünfte Folge, Heft 4 [Der ganzen Sammlung Heft 84]; Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer 1963) 103 n.71; A. Barucq, *Le livre des Proverbes* (Sources Bibliques; Paris, J. Gabalda 1964) 222; R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs Ecclesiastes. Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 18; Garden City, New York, 1965) 178n; W. McKane, *Proverbs. A New Approach* (OTL; London, SCM 1970) 652. Barucq and McKane also endorse the position of Dahood as a possible option.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. also M. Dahood, 'Northwest Semitic Notes on Genesis', *Biblica* 55 (1974) 76-82 [78].

find here in פָּרָא, a description of a particular אָדָם, the man יִשְׁמַעֲאֵל. This is the simplest explanation and adequately suits the context. Most commentators understand פָּרָא אָדָם to form a bound construct relationship (i.e. 'a wild ass of a man')<sup>16</sup>, while others render the text in a periphrastic manner.<sup>17</sup>

In Job 36:28b, Dahood translates the Hebrew:

יִרְטְפוּ עָלַי אָדָם רַב

as 'They rain down showers upon the earth'. Although supported by M. Pope,<sup>18</sup> this interpretation has not been accepted by other Semitists who have studied Job. N. H. Tur-Sinai's repointing of the last two words to form אָדָם רַב ('their rich stream') has not been followed.<sup>19</sup> Nor is it necessary to find a hypothetical 'by-form' of רַב־יָדָם ('showers') in רַב.<sup>20</sup> Rather, the remark of R. Gordis is cogent: "The traditional rendering "they shower upon all men" is entirely satisfactory; it lacks only the virtue of novelty".<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Cf. J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark 21930) 287; S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis with Introduction and Notes* (London, Methuen <sup>15</sup>1948) 182; G. von Rad, *Genesis. A Commentary* (OTL; trans., J. H. Marks; London, SCM 1961) 185, 189; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis. Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 1; Garden City, New York, Doubleday 1964) 117-8, with an Akkadian parallel (*lullū-amīlu* 'savage of a man').

<sup>17</sup>Cf. H. Gunkel, *Genesis Übersetzt und Erklärt* (HKAT 3, 1; Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 21902) 166; C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11. A Commentary* (trans., J. J. Scullion; London, SPCK; Minneapolis, Augsburg 1984) 278-9.

<sup>18</sup>*Job. Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 15; Garden City, New York 1973) 267, 274.

<sup>19</sup>*The Book of Job. A New Commentary* (Jerusalem, Kiryath Sepher <sup>2</sup>1967) 504.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job Together with a New Translation* (ICC; Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark 1921) part II, 282; H. H. Rowley, *Job* (NCB; London, Thomas Nelson 1970) 299; Pope, 274.

<sup>21</sup>*The Book of Job. Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* (Moresht volume II; New York, Jewish Theological Seminary of America 1978) 420. Cf. also G. H. A. von Ewald, *Commentary on the Book of Job with Translation* (trans., J. F. Smith; Theological Translation Fund Library, XXVIII; London and Edinburgh, Williams and Norgate 1882) 345; B. Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob Erklärt* (KHAT XVI; Freiburg, Leipzig, and Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 1897) 174-5; S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, part I, 316, part II, 282-3; E. J. Kissane, *The*

The Hebrew text of Jeremiah 32:20 includes the phrase, **וּבְיַשְׂרָאֵל וּבַבְּשָׁדָה**. This is the sixth of Dahood's examples. He translates, 'both in Israel and in the steppe'. The verse describes 'signs and wonders' which God has done in Egypt, in Israel, and **וּבַבְּשָׁדָה**. The result of these signs has been the establishing of a name (**שֵׁם**) for God. The verse is part of a section involving praise to God for the deliverance of the people of God. The context therefore is appropriate for an expression which describes God's universal fame. Thus the generic use of **אָדָם** ('humanity') would be entirely fitting for such praise,<sup>22</sup> whereas a description of God's renown as extending to the steppe would seem out of place, indeed rather strange in a context of concern for peoples rather than places.

The last example cited by Dahood is Zechariah 13:5, where the Hebrew of the second half of the verse reads:

**אֲנִי אִישׁ עֶבֶד אֲדָמָה אֲנִי כִי אָדָם הָקֵנִי בְּנִעֹרִי**

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*Book of Job Translated from a Critically Revised Hebrew Text with Commentary* (Dublin, Brown and Nolan 1939) 249, 252; S. Terrien, *Job* (CAT XIII; Neuchatel, Delachaux & Niestlé 1963) 238-9; E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans., H. Knight; London, Thomas Nelson 1967) 553-4; F. Hesse, *Hiob* (ZBK AT 14; Zürich, Theologischer Verlag 1978) 188, 190; N. C. Habel, *The Book of Job. A Commentary* (OTL; London, SCM 1985) 511, who notes:

The rain falls on 'ādām, "humankind," rather than on the 'ādāmā, "dry ground," as we might expect from other contexts. . . . The reference to 'ādām in v. 25 indicates that Elihu's focus is on human beings who experience these mysteries in person; nevertheless the 'ādām/'ādāmā, wordplay lies in the background as in Gen. 2:4-7.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia Erklärt* (KHAT XI; Tübingen and Leipzig, J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 1901) 267; S. R. Driver, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah. A Revised Translation with Introductions and Short Explanations* (London, Hodder and Stoughton 1906) 198; F. Nötscher, *Das Buch Jeremias Übersetzt und Erklärt* (HSAT VII, 2; Bonn, Peter Hanstein 1934) 242; A. Condamin, *Le livre de Jérémie traduction et commentaire* (Études bibliques; Paris, J. Gabalda 1936) 242; A. Weiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia Übersetzt und Erklärt* (ATD 20/21; Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1960) 291, 297-8; J. Bright, *Jeremiah. Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 21; Garden City, New York, Doubleday 1965) 290 (but cf. his note on 295, where he suggests Dahood's translation might be preferred); W. Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT, erste Reihe, 12; Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 1968) 210-11; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1981) 590 (with a footnote similar to that of Bright); R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah. A Commentary* (OTL; London, SCM 1986) 624.

Dahood translates: 'A tiller of the earth am I for the earth possessed me from my youth'. However, most commentators have been satisfied to follow J. Wellhausen's emendation of this difficult text.<sup>23</sup> Wellhausen proposed to redivide the אדם וקני and to add a yodh between the two nuns. This yields, אדמה קניני, i.e. 'the land has been my possession'. This seems plausible, although the suggestion of H. L. Ginsberg should also be considered.<sup>24</sup> He takes אדם as the root meaning, 'to be red', and reports the verb as a passive form. His translation is: 'I was plied with the red stuff from my youth on'; the 'red stuff' here being wine.

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<sup>23</sup>*Die kleinen Propheten* (Skizzen und Vorarbeiten, V; Berlin, Reimer 31898) 201; Nowack, *Die kleinen Propheten*, 413; Marti, *Dodekapropheten*, 449; E. Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch*, 519-20; R. C. Dentan, 'The Book of Zechariah. Chapters 9-14. Exegesis', 1109; F. Horst, 'Nahum bis Maleachi', 256; J. G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 196; R. P. Gordon, 'Targum Variant Agrees With Wellhausen!' *ZAW* 87 (1975) 218-19; A. Lacocque, 'Zacharie 9-14', 194-5; K. L. Barker, 'Zechariah', 688. W. Rudolph, *Haggai - Sacharja 1-8 - Sacharja 9-14 - Maleachi*, 226-7, takes a slightly different approach, by preserving the hiphil verb form and accepting the emendation of אדם אדמה. He translates: 'ein Ackerbauer bin ich, ja [dem Ackerbau] galt mein Eifer von Jugend auf'.

<sup>24</sup>The Oldest Record of Hysteria with Physical Stigmata, Zech 13:2-6', 23-7 in Y. Avishur and J. Blau (edd.) *Studies in Bible and the Ancient Near East Presented to Samuel E. Loewenstamm on His Seventieth Birthday* (Jerusalem, E. Rubenstein 1978).

### 3. Meaning 5: a geographic name

The existence of a geographic site with the name אֶדְמִי is established by both Egyptian and Hebrew sources.<sup>25</sup> It has been identified with Tell ed-Dāmiye, a site in the Jordan Valley.<sup>26</sup> Its appearance in Joshua 3:16 is certain. Suggested appearances elsewhere are conjectural.

### 4. Conclusion

The results of this survey of the various definitions listed for אֶדְמִי have led to conclusions that cast doubt on two of the five meanings suggested by L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner's lexicon. Although it may be possible to find the root 'dm with the meanings of 'skin, hide, leather' or 'earth, steppe' in cognate Semitic languages, their appearance in Biblical Hebrew is hypothetical at best. This is not to say that the texts cited do not possess grammatical and syntactical problems. However, obscurity should not be the rationale for the introduction of a new semantic category. Indeed, replacing one noun with another does not lessen the grammatical problems which exist in some of the passages discussed. Nor is the claim made that passages such as Proverbs 30:14b are not well suited for the translation of אֶדְמִי proposed by Dahood and followed by Koehler and Baumgartner. Rather, it is more important to understand that adequate renderings exist within the recognized Hebrew semantic range of אֶדְמִי with the meaning,

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<sup>25</sup>For Egyptian sources, cf. B. Mazar, 'The Campaign of Pharaoh Shishak to Palestine', 57-66 in *Volume du congrès. Strasbourg 1956* (VTS IV; Leiden, E. J. Brill 1957); *ibid.*, 'Pharaoh Shishak's Campaign to the Land of Israel', 139-50 in Sh. Ahituv and B. A. Levine (eds.) *The Early Biblical Period. Historical Studies* (Jerusalem, Israel Exploration Society 1986) 145-6; Sh. Ahituv, *Canaanite Toponyms in Ancient Egyptian Documents* (Jerusalem, Magnes; Leiden, E. J. Brill 1984) 50. For the Hebrew Bible references, cf. J. Simons, *The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament. A Concise Commentary in XXXII Chapters* (Leiden, E. J. Brill 1959) §§ 462, 565-6, 825, 1467-8; B. Mazar, 'אֶדְמִי', *Encyclopedia Biblica. I* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, Bialik 1950) col. 109; Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible. A Historical Geography* (trans., A. F. Rainey; Philadelphia, Westminster 21979) 34, 58, 60, 109, 121, 126, 313, 325, 327, 429.

<sup>26</sup>N. Glueck, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine, IV. Part I: Text* (AASOR XXV-XXVIII; New Haven, American Schools of Oriental Research 1951) 329-33.



'humanity' in all of the examples above. Because this is the case it is unwise to introduce new meanings into the Biblical Hebrew lexicon. Other orthographically distinct forms of the *'dm* root provide an adequate semantic range for the meaning, 'earth, land', as used throughout the Hebrew Bible.<sup>27</sup> Therefore it is probable that, whatever the original meaning of the Hebrew word אָדָם, its understood meaning among Hebrew speakers and writers during the Biblical period need not be found through the introduction of previously unrecognized meanings from cognate languages.

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<sup>27</sup>This is not to discount the obvious word play between אָדָם and אֶרֶץ in Genesis chapter 2, a word play which reflects a concern to portray humanity's origin and association with the earth. Cf. Delitzsch, *Genesis* 117-18; Driver, *Genesis* 37; Speiser, *Genesis* 16; Westermann, *Genesis* 199-207.