

Genesis

Creation, Covenants, All Grace – study 2



In the beginning

GOD

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.

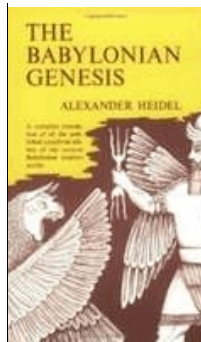
-- Ex. 20:2,3

GENESIS 1 -- FOUNDATION OF HUMAN FREEDOM (1:1,2a)

1:1 What truth must Israel acknowledge first if they are ever to be free of Egyptian bondage? (John 8:31,32 -- note the 1st century parallel)

Here at the very outset we are shown what is to be the true subject of the Bible from its first page to its last; it is to be God speaking to us about Himself. Mark that well: He has something to tell us about the world in which He has placed us, much to tell us about ourselves and our fellow-men; but all that He has to tell us in the Bible about any of these things is for the sake of religion, for the sake of bringing Himself near to us and drawing us near to Himself. -- **Fenton J. A. Hort**, *Sermons on the Books of the Bible* p. 27

It is no accident that *God* is the subject of the first sentence of the Bible, for this word dominates the whole chapter and catches the eye at every point of the page: it is used some thirty-five times in as many verses of the story. The passage, indeed the Book, is about Him first of all; to read it with any other primary interest (which is all too possible) is to misread it. -- **Derek Kidner**, *Genesis* p. 43



ALEXANDER
HEIDEL
notes the
parallels with
Babylonian
mythology

created The Hebrew verb does not of necessity signify creation out of nothing ... But in the sense of *creating* at all, it is used of God only: and Gesenius thinks that in passages like this, the sense of creation out of nothing must be taken as intended by it. -- **Henry Alford**, *The Book of Genesis* p. 1

... it is apparent that for the Babylonians matter was eternal. This conclusion is confirmed by the historian Diodorus Siculus (last century B.C.), who expressly states: "The Chaldeans say that the substance of the world is eternal and that it neither had a first beginning nor that it will at a later time suffer destruction." The Babylonians could conceive of a time when there was neither heaven nor earth, a time when only Apsu and Tiamat existed, but apparently they could not conceive of a time when there was nothing whatever except a transcendental deity; they postulated the existence of the material as well as that of the spiritual or the divine. -- **Alexander Heidel**, *The Babylonian Genesis* p. 89

Luther was once asked what God was doing before the creation of the world. His answer was that he was cutting canes for people who ask such useless questions. -- **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, *Creation and Fall/Temptation* p. 17

Nothing is here by chance; everything must be considered carefully, deliberately, and precisely ... These sentences cannot be easily overinterpreted theologically ... The sequence of particular declarations in vs. 1-3 comprises a theological wealth of reference whose fullness is scarcely to be comprehended. -- **Gerhard von Rad**, *Genesis* pp. 45-46

Implicit in this verse are important statements concerning God's nature and character, statements which refute at least six fundamental heresies. The first is *atheism*, the view that God does not exist. The Bible offers no philosophical argument for the existence of God; it assumes His existence and views everything in the light of that assumption. The second is *polytheism*. The singular form of the key verb indicates that the Hebrews believed in one god and not many. There is no evidence that Israel's religion evolved from animism through polytheism and henotheism before it reached ethical monotheism. Such a suggestion is quite arbitrary and in obvious conflict with statements of Scripture. Third, this verse opposes a radical *materialism* which holds matter to be eternal. Without preexisting material God brought the earth -- that is, matter -- into existence. Fourth, since God is clearly distinguished from His creation, this verse clearly denies *pantheism*. Fifth, the supernatural origin of the earth and the universe refutes *naturalism*; God is the Architect and Creator of all that exists. Finally, the uniqueness of this concept of origins in ancient literature makes untenable the position that special revelation is nonexistent or impossible. Human reason and inquiry, while valid, are seriously limited; the problem of origins, therefore, is best solved in the light of biblical truth. -- **John J. Davis**, *Paradise to Prison* p. 42 (emph. added)

1:2a How does this verse undermine the foundation of pagan polytheism?

Enuma elish and Genesis, chapter 1, both refer to a watery chaos, a feature which is found also in the cosmologies of the Egyptians and Phoenicians and in the Vedic literature. *Enuma elish* conceives of this chaos as *living* matter and

as being an integral part of the first two principles, Apsu and Tiamat, in whom all the elements of the future universe were commingled, while, according to Genesis, it is nothing but a mass of *inanimate* matter, which was afterward separated into the waters above and below, into dry land and ocean. -- **Alexander Heidel**, *op.cit.*, p. 97

According to the writings of the Egyptians, there was a time when neither heaven nor earth existed, and when nothing had being except the boundless primeval water, which was, however, shrouded with thick darkness. In this condition the primeval water remained for a considerable time, notwithstanding that it contained within it the germs of the things which afterwards came into existence in this world, and the world itself. At length the spirit of the primeval water felt the desire for creative activity, and having uttered the word, the world sprang straightway into being in the form which had already been depicted in the mind of the spirit before he spoke the word which resulted in its creation. The next act of creation was the formation of a germ, or egg, from which sprang Ra, the Sun-god, within whose shining form was embodied the almighty power of the divine spirit. -- **E.A. Wallis Budge**, *The Egyptian Religion* pp. 40-41



E.A. WALLIS BUDGE
notes the parallels
with Egyptian
cosmology

The opening sentence is a grand specimen of the beauty and truth, here compacted into the briefest compass. It excludes atheism, pantheism, polytheism, materialism; denies the eternity of matter, and teaches the eternity, self-existence, independence, omnipotence, and wisdom of the Creator. -- **A.T. Pierson**, *Keys to the Word* p. 2

What is the "gap theory"?

The gap theory, more accurately described as the ruin-reconstruction theory, sees an indefinite time gap between verse 1 and 2. This theory, in one form or another, has been advocated for centuries, but its modern form originated with Thomas Chalmers of Edinburgh University. He proposed it in 1814 to accommodate Georges Cuvier's theory that the earth's fossiliferous strata are the product of a series of catastrophes. Chalmers made room for these catastrophes between verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1. The gap theory was given wide circulation early in the twentieth century by George H. Pember, whose *Earth's Earliest Ages* appeared in 1907, and by the *Scofield Reference Bible*, which appeared in 1909. C.I. Scofield advocated the gap theory in a note on Genesis 1, but in a later edition of his reference bible the note was relegated to Isaiah 45. Pember argued that the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1:1,2 had been deeply influenced by the pagan concept of creation out of chaos. In the third edition of his book, however, Pember revealed his real motive in advocating the gap theory: "the solution of geological difficulties connected with the Bible Critical care in translating the original is all that it [the gap theory] needs for its support; and while it absolutely disables the attacks of geology upon the book

of Genesis, it casts no discredit upon science itself for, when rightly understood, the Bible is found to have left an interval of undefined magnitude between creation and the post-tertiary period, and men may bridge it as they can with their discoveries without fear of impugning the revelations of God." The most scholarly and lengthy defense of the gap theory to date is Arthur C. Custance's *Without Form and Void*, published in 1970.

The gap theory, as generally taught today, asserts that in the dateless past God created a perfect heaven and earth. The earth was inhabited by a pre-Adamic race and ruled by Satan, who dwelt in the Garden of Eden. Satan desired to become like God and eventually rebelled (Isa. 14). Thus sin entered the universe, and God's judgment came in the form of first a great flood and then, when the light and heat from the sun ended, a global ice age. All plant, animal, and human fossils date from this great flood and are genetically unrelated to plants, animals, and humans on the earth today. -- **John J. Davis**, *op.cit.*, pp. 42,43

Teachings of the Bible do not need to depend on isolated words. Important truths are developed in various parts of Scripture, but no clear case is established for the "gap theory" by appealing to a possible translation of one word in a way that seems to be out of proportion to the consequent teaching. -- **Clifford Wilson**, *In the Beginning God...* p. 17