

THE CREATION (Genesis 1-2)

The first book in the Torah is entitled *Bereshith* or "In the beginning" (Hebrew Bible) and "Genesis" or "origins" in the Greek translation (Septuagint). Though the book is formally anonymous, Moses is traditionally ascribed as the author, and the five books of the Torah are often called the "Books of Moses." This, in itself, does not mean that Moses necessarily originated all of the accounts in Genesis, and there are anachronisms that clearly indicate hands later than Moses (e.g., 14:14//Jg. 18:29; 36:31ff., etc.). Many of the accounts in Genesis probably existed before Moses' time, and the final form of the book probably antedates his time. Moses may have compiled and/or composed materials in Genesis, but all scholars, both liberal and conservative, admit the probability there were strands of ancient material from different contributors which were brought together in a single collection.

The material in the book falls into two major blocks, primeval history (chapters 1-11) and patriarchal history (chapters 12-50). The first recounts four primary events, the **creation**, the **human rebellion** (usually termed "the fall"), the **great flood**, and the **dispersion of the nations**. This section is unique in that it traces human origins back into the Pre-historic Period (i.e., prior to the invention of writing). This history exhibits three horizons for reading it: the **historical** (regarding real people and events), the **symbolic** (the use of archetypes to represent primordial truths about all humans and events), and the **apologetic** (a corrective to then-current Egyptian and Mesopotamian cosmogonies).

There are two accounts of the creation, one focusing upon the origins of the universe, with the creation of humans as the crowning creative act (1:1--2:4), and the other focusing upon the creation of the humans themselves. In the first account, the name for God is the Hebrew *Elohim*, a common plural form of the word "God" in the ancient Near East. (This plural noun, however, is used with a singular verb, carrying the nuance of a plurality of majesty rather than of multiple beings, i.e., the one God who is multi-faceted). The second account consistently uses the compound title *Yahweh Elohim*, translated "LORD God" in the English Versions.

The story of the creation is clearly poetic in character. The distinguishing mark of Hebrew poetry is

universally recognized as parallelism. The fact that the creation account is punctuated by the repeating phrase, "It was evening, and it was morning," as well as the repeating divine value judgments, "God saw that it was good," argues strongly for a poetic character to the account. Furthermore, there is a marked parallelism in the structural form of the six creative days.

As such, the reader should not approach the creation story as though it were a description written by a

Parallelism in the First Account (ABC//A'B'C')	
Forming	Filling
THE THREE PRIMARY DOMAINS	INHABITANTS OF THE THREE DOMAINS
1st Day (celestial) <i>Light and dark</i>	4th Day <i>Sun, moon and stars</i>
2nd Day (sublunary) <i>Sky and water</i>	5th Day <i>Birds and fish</i>
3rd Day (terrestrial) <i>Earth and seas culminating in the production of vegetation and its seed</i>	6th Day <i>Livestock, game and creeping things culminating in humanity and its seed</i>

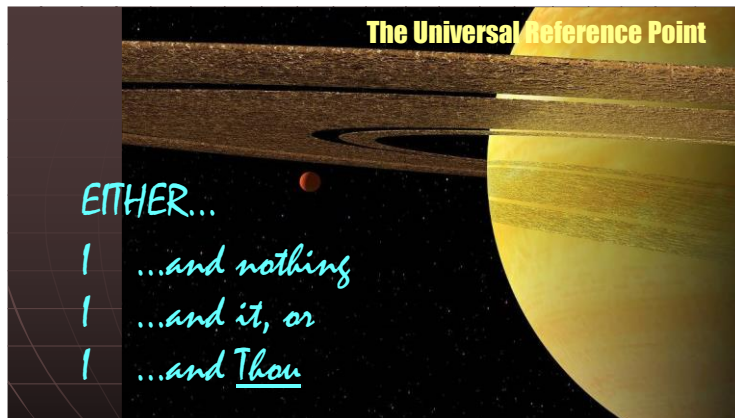
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newspaper reporter. The emphasis is theological rather than science-oriented. This is not to impinge upon the truthfulness of the account but only to recognize that one should read it according to the genre in which it was written. Genesis informs us that God is the author of the universe, and the creation account suggests the sovereignty and majesty of his power; it does not seek to satisfy our curiosity as to “how” he made it except that it came into existence by his creative excellence.

The First Account

In the first account, the origin of the universe is described as the free creation of God by his sovereign word (1:3, 6, 14, 20, 24; cf. Heb. 11:3; John 1:1-3). The origin of the universe was a process, beginning with the creation of basic matter (1:1-2) and following with the subsequent fashioning and shaping of this matter into the universe and earth as we know it today (1:3-25). The movement of the creation narrative was from formlessness and emptiness (1:2) toward order and habitation (cf. Isa. 45:18). The final act of creation was the making of humans as male and female in God's own image (1:26-30). Everything God made was good (1:31), and when he had finished, he rested (2:1-

4). Many foundational truths derive from this first creation story.



An Infinite Reference Point

Genesis sets for us the parameters which control our world-view. It begins with the existence of God himself. Genesis does not seek to prove God's existence; it assumes his reality as the most fundamental given. The fact of an infinite reference point is both positive and negative. It is positive in that it teaches the power,

spirituality, wisdom, and goodness of God. It defines what is ultimate, non-contingent reality. On the other hand, it is negative in that it forbids idolatry. The created human is not worthy of worship but is also a creature along with the other created beings God made. Secondly, it depicts ultimate reality as personal. God is not impervious force, but he is actively engaged in bringing order, beauty, and relationship within his handiwork. God communicates within himself (1:26), and above all, he communicates with his highest creature (1:28-30). He is a “Thou,” not an “It.”

A Positive Affirmation of the Universe

The world God made is good (1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). It was made to be used and enjoyed by his creatures, and in fact, the human creature was set as the steward over it all (1:28-30). Especially for modern humans, this mandate of stewardship calls for ecological responsibility.

Principle of Work and Rest

The social norms of work and rest have their origin in the nature of God himself. Work is not a curse but a fundamental structure based on the fact that God works. Rest, by the same token, is not worthless or irresponsible, for it, too, finds its source in the God who completed his work and found satisfaction in ceasing from his labor.

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Maleness and Femaleness

The bisexuality of the human race reflects the capacity for personal relationship, a relationship that existed within God's own being, for he created humans in his own image (1:26-27). God is not gendered, but he does have the capacity for love within his inner self. Humans are social creatures, and the most intimate of human relationships is between mates who were created for each other as male and female.

The Hebrew word for human ('*adam*'), derived from the word for soil ('*adamah*'), is generic. While often translated by the English equivalent "man," it is not strictly a gendered word but primarily denotes a human being (cf. 5:2). There are two categories which belong to '*adam*', male (*zakar*) and

female (*n'gevah*). Both are fully human, and both bear the image of God.

Imago Dei

The image of God in humans is stated but not defined in Genesis except in terms of the male/female relationship. However, it probably anticipates the fundamental intellectual and moral character of what it means to be human (cf. 5:3; 9:6), and as human history unfolds, this character is displayed in a multiplicity of human potentials.

Imago Dei

God created humans in the divine image. Primarily this refers to:

- Communal life ("Let us make man...in our image" -- the life of a human is not fully expressed as an individual but in communion with another)
- Authority and stewardship ("Let them rule" -- humans are superintendents over the created order)

THE UNIQUENESS OF HUMANS IN GOD'S IMAGE:

Personal	Creative	Transcendent	Moral
Intentional	Self-aware	Relational	

- Personality/Uniqueness
- Volition/Freedom, the capacity for choice
- Transcendence over the environment
- Intelligence, the capacity for reason and knowledge
- Morality, the capacity for recognizing good/evil
- Gregariousness, capacity for communication, fellowship, and the social dimension
- Creativity, the urge to imagine, invent and produce
- Sensibility, the ability to feel pathos and joy
- Capacity for sacrificial love
- Self-awareness and self-contemplation

COSMIC TEMPLE

The divine image in humans also implies that the created world was a sort of cosmic temple in which God would dwell. Ancient Near Eastern temple texts were widely known, and a creature bearing the "image" of God placed in the created world would immediately have been recognized by ancient people as a representative of God himself. Eden, the garden of God, would then be the Most Holy Place of this cosmic temple.

The Second Account

If the first account describes humans as the crowning act of the whole creative process, the second account focuses more closely on the humans God made. The primeval garden is depicted in exquisite idyllic terms. Everything was prepared for the arrival of the first humans, even the possibility for spiritual awakening. The first human was born free. He could only remain free by the

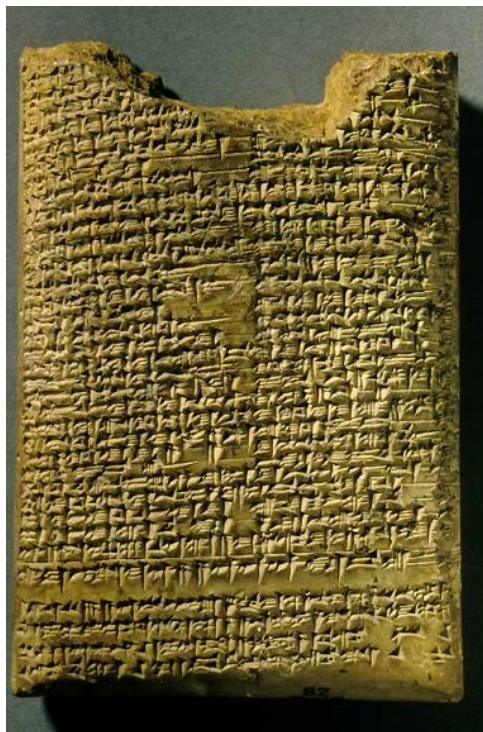
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power of his right choices in response to God's wise directives. Furthermore, the garden became the scene where the human's creative nature first began to express itself through work. Work was not a punishment resulting from sin a creative privilege grounded in the fact that the human was made in the divine Image, and therefore, like God, he too could work (2:3).

There is some discussion about whether the two trees, each yielding a certain kind of knowledge, not to mention a talking snake, should be taken at face value or as a product of poetic literary imagery. Many Christians have regarded them as literal, but interpreting the scene as a poetic metaphor has in its favor the observation that the expression "tree of life" seems to be used more figuratively in other parts of the OT (cf. Pro. 3:18; 11:30; 13:12), while the snake is connected to the metaphor of the great Red Dragon, the image of consummate evil (Rev. 12:3, 9).

The first human was shaped from dirt, and God breathed into him life (2:7). He placed this creature in a tropical garden, while carefully instructing him as to his responsibilities (2:8-17). Yet God knew that the human, as a relational creature made in his own image, would not do well by himself (2:18). To sharpen the man's realization that aloneness was not good, he allowed him to name all the animals (2:19-20a). Of all the creatures, only the man was without his mate. So, God formed a woman, taking her from the man, so that each would belong to the other (2:20b-25). The first divine comment on the nature of marriage comes in four succinct directives: independence, permanence, union, and intimacy (2:24-25).

The creation account in the Bible is unique, even though it stands among and has points of contact with other cosmogonies in the ancient world. It was neither the only one nor the earliest account of



Enuma elish, Tablet IV
British Museum, London

origins in the literature of the ancient Near East, and both the Mesopotamians and the Egyptians produced cosmogonies that antedate the Book of Genesis. The Mesopotamian account, called *Enuma elish*, held that the universe came about as the struggle between the gods and goddesses of chaos and order. Marduk, king of the gods of order, slew Tiamat, last of the gods of chaos. He split Tiamat's body into the heavens and earth. The Egyptian accounts, on the other hand, held that life originated from the primordial waters out of which appeared islands. Re, the Egyptian god of creation, entered the universe by creating himself and then creating other deities. In Canaan, where the Israelites eventually would live, the gods were personifications of the forces of nature and could be manipulated by ritual magic.

Throughout the ancient Near East there were pantheons of gods and goddesses. Genesis stands unique, both in its description of one God who acted alone, and in its affirmation that the origins of the universe were by his spoken word in which he created the heavens and earth. As such, Genesis serves as a corrective to the alternative cosmogonies in the ancient Near East.