

Genesis 1:1-3

15 December 2022

Reading from the New International Version, 2011



Dead Sea Scroll fragment 4Q7 with Genesis 1. Date: circa 50 BCE.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Genesis_1_Dead_Sea_Scroll.jpg

Learning objectives

- We shall discover why translations differ.
- We shall learn some Hebrew grammar. (Yeah!)
- We shall affirm divine creation.

Cosmogony — cosmology (dictionary.com)

Cosmology [koz-mol-o-jee], noun

- 1 the branch of philosophy dealing with the origin and general structure of the universe.
- 2 the branch of astronomy that deals with the general structure and evolution of the universe.

Cosmogony [koz-mog-uh-nee], noun

a theory or story of the origin and development of the universe, the solar system...

Genesis 1:1-3 (NIV)

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

[Here is how he did it:]

² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Genesis 1:1-3

Genesis 1:1 (NIV)

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Revelation: Spirit = Origin of matter

- Energy (God)
- Time (beginning)
- Design (created)
- Space (sky, heavens)
- Matter (earth)

Genesis 1:1-3 Structure: First creation story

1 Summary statement (v1, compare 2:4).

2 Conditions on earth at the 'beginning' (v2, 2:5-6).

No inhabitants, darkness, wind blowing.

3 First action: 'God said' (v3, 2:7 'God caused...').

Appearance of light, dispelling the darkness.

Defense of this structure follows...

"In the beginning"

- Hebrew: בְּרֵאשִׁית, bə-réšît, 'In (a) beginning'.
- 5X in Tanakh, 4X = start of a king's reign (Jer).
- Without 'the' = 'Construct state' = a beginning 'of' something (requires a following noun).
- With 'the', initial b takes a different vowel: ba.
- réšît means anything 'first' in time or quality.
- réšît modifies only nouns, never verbs.
- réšît may modify the whole verse or paragraph.
- Some translate: 'When God began to create...'

"God"

- Hebrew: אֱלֹהִים, 'Ēlōhîm.
- Plural form = concrete example of abstract idea, frequent in Hebrew. E.g. the skies, but the earth.
- 'Ēlōhîm can mean god(s), spirit(s), ghost(s).
- With a verb in the singular, 'Ēlōhîm = God.
- A singular Deity = the Creator of entire world.
- Other spirit-beings were present at the creation (angels, 1:26; Serpent, 3:1; and cherubim, 3:24).
- Yahweh = an elohim; no other elohim = Yahweh.

Genesis 1:1-3

God in Genesis (Dennis Prager, Genesis, 2019)

- A universal God of all ethnicities: all humans are equals.
- An invisible, spiritual God: non-physical reality.
- A moral God: just, not capricious.
- A supernatural God: no nature gods.
- A loving God: joyful relationships with humans.
- God's image: universal human worth and rights.

“created”

- Hebrew: בָּרָא, *bārā'* 3rd person singular, perfect.
- Hebrew has only two 'tenses': perfect (simple action) and imperfect (other action, e.g. v3). Either can be past, present or future, according to context. Look for time words.
- If original was a participle (*bôrē'*), then translate 'When God began creating.' Oldest manuscripts have no vowels, and pronunciations changed.
- Means 'to make new' from existing material, not *ex nihilo* (from nothing).

Three Theories of Creation And Chaos (B Waltke)

- Restitution Theory

Original Creation > Rebellion & judgment > Chaos > Renovation

- Initially Chaotic Theory

Original Creation = Initially chaotic conditions > Renovation

- Pre-creation Chaos Theory

Original creation = Chaotic conditions

“Now the earth was”

- Hebrew: וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה, *wəhā'āreṣ hoytâ*.
- *wə* = 'and'. *hā* = 'the'. Both are prefixes.
- *āreṣ* = Visible land, ground, soil, dry earth.
- First perfect tense verb in non-initial position cannot mean 'became'. It must mean 'was'.
- 'And' disconnected from verb = disjunctive.
- Every sentence from 1:2 through 2:3 begins with *wə* = 'and'.

“formless and void”

- Hebrew: תֹהוּ וָבֵהוּ, *tōhû wābōhû*.
- *tōhû* = 'chaos'. In Ug. and Ar. = 'wilderness'.
- *bōhû* = 'emptiness'. Uninhabited.
- In Isa 34:11 Jer 4:23, God's judgement likened unto a return to the premordial state.
- The world was unfit for human habitation.
- In pagan cosmology, the early earth was a playground for chaos monsters, including Levithan (Lotan).

“darkness was over the surface of the deep”

- Hebrew: וַיְהִי עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹמוֹ, wəḥōšek ‘al-pənê təhōwm.
- God is about to dispel darkness, a symbol of all that opposes Him.
- Does darkness have an existence other than the absence of light?
- The ‘deep’ = salty sea, in the Babylonian creation myth is the goddess Tiamat whom Marduk slays.
- In Gen 1.2 God masters of the deep and names it.
- In Gen 2:7, the deep springs up to cover earth.

“The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters”

- Hebrew: וַיָּרֻחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֵפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם, wərûaḥ ‘ēlōhîm mərəḥepet cal-pənê hammāyim.
- rūaḥ translates wind, breath and spirit.
- NRSV (2022): ‘a wind from God’.
- In the Babylonian Enuma Elish, the sky god, Anu, creates the four winds that stir up the deep.
- Dan 7:2, ‘I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts came up out of the sea’.
- Rev 13:1, ‘I saw a beast rising out of the sea’.

“God said, ...”

- Hebrew: וַיֹּמַר אֱלֹהִים, wayyōmer ‘ēlōhîm.
- yōmer = 3rd person singular imperfect.
- wa + yōmer = wayyōmer.
- ‘Waw (~vav) + dagesh (dot) + imperfect at start of a clause = ‘waw consecutive’ = ‘then, now or next’.
- ‘said’ = Elohim’s first act of creation.
- ‘By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command [word], so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.’ Heb 11:3

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Genesis 1  NET2  Aa   Daily

The Creation of the World

1 In the beginning ¹ God ² created ³ the heavens and the earth. ⁴

2 Now ⁵ the earth ⁶ was without shape and empty, ⁷ and darkness ⁸ was over the surface of the watery deep, ⁹ but the Spirit of God ¹⁰ was moving ¹¹ over the surface ¹² of the water. ¹³ **3** God said, ¹⁴ “Let there be ¹⁵ light.” ¹⁶ And there was light! **4** God saw ¹⁷ that the light was good, ¹⁸ so God separated ¹⁹ the light from the darkness. **5** God called ²⁰ the light “day” and the darkness ²¹ “night.” There was evening, and there was morning, marking the first day. ²²

14sn God said. By speaking, God brings the world into existence. The efficacious nature of the word of the LORD is a prominent theme in this chapter. It introduces the Law, the words and commandments from the LORD that must be obeyed. The ten decrees of God in this chapter anticipate the ten words in the Decalogue ([Exod 20:2-17](#)).

tn The prefixed verb form with the vav (ו) consecutive introduces the narrative sequence. Ten times in the chapter the decree of God in creation will be so expressed. For the power of the divine word in creation, see [Ps 33:9](#); [John 1:1-3](#); [1 Cor 8:6](#); [Col 1:16](#).

“Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

- Hebrew: אָוֶרַח אֶחָד וְאֶחָד, wayəḥî’ōwr wayəḥî-’ōwr.
- 1st wayəḥî’ōwr = ‘Light be!’ (Imperfect as imperative)
- 2nd wayəḥî’ōwr = ‘Light was!’ (waw consecutive).
- Light = symbol of life, wisdom and righteousness.
- What was the source of this light? The sun?
- As a polemic against pagan beliefs, what is the importance of this verse?

Genesis 1:4-5 (NET2)

⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.

⁵ God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.”

And there was evening, and there was morning — the first day.