

The Creation

0. Introduction:

0.1. The three sessions

- 1) Gen 1: The World as God's Temple according to the Priest
- 2) Gen 2-3: The Garden, the Presence of Evil and the First Gospel
- 3) Gen 1-3 in Ancient and Contemporary Culture (Myth, Literature and Evolution)

0.2. Bibliography:

Brown R.E., An Introduction to the New Testament (Doubleday 1997).

1. Creation in Genesis 1

1.1. Pentateuch – introductory issues

A) The author

B) The time

C) The purpose

1.2. Gen 1: *date, author and purpose of the work*

A) The author - Priest

B) The time: the 6th BC

C) The purpose: apology of Jahwistic religion

1.3. *Composition and literary genre*

a) rhythmic prose (close to poem) with refrain „And God saw that x was good”

b) composition subdivided in the consecutive days in which God creates the world

c) climax – the sixth day and the creation of mankind

d) the poetic character of the composition does not allow any fundamentalist or scientific interpretations

Day 1	Light	Day 4	Luminaries
Day 2	Sky	Day 5	Birds and Fish
Day 3	Earth and Plants	Day 6	Animals and Man (Plants for food)
	Day 7	Sabbath	

2. Textual analysis

Genesis 1:1-5

WTT **Genesis 1:1** הָאָרֶץ: בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת

- והָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֵהוֹ וְבָהּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: ²
- וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אֹר וַיְהִי-אֹר: ³
- וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָרֶץ כִּי-טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאָרֶץ וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ: ⁴
- וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קִרְא לַיְלָה וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד: פ ⁵

In the beginning (1,1-2)

RSV **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

w.1-2 – *bereshit bara Elohim*

Four possible understandings of the syntax of these verses have been defended.

1. V 1 is a temporal clause subordinate to the main clause in v 2: “In the beginning when God created ... , the earth was without form....” (Ibn Ezra)

2. V 1 is a temporal clause subordinate to the main clause in v 3 (v 2 is a parenthetical comment). “In the beginning when God created ... (now the earth was formless) God said....” (Rashi)

3. V 1 is a main clause, summarizing all the events described in vv 2–31. It is a title to the chapter as a whole, and could be rendered “In the beginning God was the creator of heaven and earth.” What being creator of heaven and earth means is then explained in more detail in vv 2–31.

4. V 1 is a main clause describing the first act of creation. Vv 2 and 3 describe subsequent phases in God’s creative activity. This is the traditional view.

Theologically these different translations are of great consequence, for apart from #4, the translations all presuppose the existence of chaotic preexistent matter before the work of creation began.

Created - בָּרָא

First, it should be noted that God, the God of Israel, is always subject of בָּרָא. Creation is never predicated of pagan deities. Second, the text never states what God creates out of. Third, the most frequently named products of creation are man, (e.g., 1:27), and unexpected novelties (e.g., Num 16:30; Isa 65:17); more rarely mentioned are the sea monsters (Gen 1:21), mountains (Amos 4:13), and animals (Ps 104:30).

It is therefore clear that בָּרָא is not a term exclusively reserved for creation out of nothing. For example, it can be used of the creation of Israel (Isa 43:15). Nevertheless, as with the word “create” in English, there is a stress on the artist’s freedom and power—the more so in the Hebrew as the word is used solely for God’s activity.

It is therefore clear that בָּרָא is not a term exclusively reserved for creation out of nothing.

BGT **2 Maccabees 7:28** ἀξιώ σε τέκνον ἀναβλέψαντα εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα ἰδόντα γινῶναι ὅτι οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων ἐποίησεν αὐτὰ ὁ θεός καὶ τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος οὕτω γίνεται

RSV **2 Maccabees 7:28** I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus also mankind comes into being.

(2 Ma. 7:28 RSV)

אלהים “God.” “The first subject of Genesis and the Bible is God” (Procksch, 438). The word is the second most frequent noun in the OT. It is derived from the common Semitic word for god *il*. As here, Hebrew generally prefers the plural form of the noun, which except when it means “gods,” i.e., heathen deities, is construed with a singular verb. Though the plural has often been taken to be a plural of majesty or power, it is doubtful whether this is relevant to the interpretation of אלהים. It is simply the ordinary word for God: plural in form but singular in meaning.

Heaven and earth – *hendiadys* – everything

w.2 – *tohu wabohu* – formless and void desert; Is 34:11 and Jer 4:23.

The same point is made in another powerful image in the next clause, “darkness covered the deep.” חֹשֶׁךְ “darkness” is another evocative word in Hebrew. If light symbolizes God, darkness evokes everything that is anti-God: the wicked (Prov 2:13), judgment (Exod 10:21), death (Ps 88:13).

In a small number of passages, including this one, תהום is identified with the primeval ocean that is supposed to surround and underlie the earth (e.g., Gen 7:11). But there is no hint in the biblical text that the deep was a power, independent of God, which he had to fight to control. Rather it is part of his creation that does his bidding (cf. Ps 104:6; Prov 8:27–28).

Gunkel suggested that Hebrew תהום was to be identified with Tiamat, the Babylonian goddess, slain by Marduk, whose carcass was used to create heaven and earth. He saw in Gen 1:2 an allusion to the Mesopotamian creation myths.

God’s Spirit (gusty wind?) over the abyss of waters – Dt 32,11 – hovering like an eagle

The first day (1,3-5)

³ And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God 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, one day.

Though it is not itself divine, light is often used metaphorically for life, salvation, the commandments, and the presence of God (Ps 56:14; Isa 9:1; Prov 6:23; Exod 10:23).

Tob – good light, the reflection of God’s goodness; the gradation of goodness and vicinity

ww.4-5 – God separates and names – gives laws and establishes his authority cf. 2:20; 2 Kgs 23:34; 24:17.

The second day (1,6-8)

⁶ And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." ⁷ And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. ⁸ And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

w.6 – firmament, hebr. *rakija*– metal element hammered and expanded Ex 39,3

The word is derived etymologically from **רָקַע** to “stamp, spread” (Ezek 6:11; Isa 42:5). In Exod 39:3 it means “to spread by hammering.” (piel). Job 37:18 speaks of the skies being “spread out hard as a molten mirror.”

ww.6-8 – the heaven as a natural phenomenon not an abode of deities

The third day (1,9-13)

⁹ And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, a third day. (Gen. 1:9-13 RSV)

God tames dangerous waters

(Ps 89,10 - cf. Ps 104,7-9; Jr 5,22; Job 7,12; 26,12)

ww.9-13 – earth and plants, order and abundance

“According to their types.” **תָּיִד** “type” is a common word in lists, especially in priestly material (cf. vv 21, 24–25; 6:20; 7:14; Lev 11:14–29; Deut 14:13–18). There runs through this chapter a concern with **definitions and divisions**. God has created different types of plants and given them the power to reproduce: “seed bearing, fruit bearing.” There is a givenness about time and space which God has ordered by his own decree. The different species of plant and animal life again bear testimony to God’s creative plan. The implication, though not stated, is clear: **what God has distinguished and created distinct, man ought not to confuse (Lev 19:19; Deut 22:9–11). Order, not chaos, is the hallmark of God’s activity.**

The fourth day (1,14-19)

¹⁴ And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶ And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. ¹⁷ And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day. (Gen. 1:14-19 RSV)

ww.14-19 – lights in firmament, sun and moon (only on the 4th day), polemic against the foreign cults of שמש and ירח *Shamash* (sun god) and *Yarih* (the moon deity).

The most obvious reason for the detail in the fourth day's description is the importance of the astral bodies in ancient Near Eastern thought. In neighboring cultures, the sun and the moon were some of the most important gods in the pantheon, and the stars were often credited with controlling human destiny (cf. Hasel, *AUSS* 10 [1972] 12–15). **So there is probably a polemic thrust behind Genesis' treatment of the theme. This comes out in several ways.**

First, the sun, moon, and stars are created by God: **they are creatures, not gods.** And with creatureliness goes **transience**; unlike the Hittite sun-god, they are not “from eternity.”

Second, the sun and moon are not given their usual Hebrew names שֶׁמֶשׁ and יָרֵחַ here, which might suggest an identification with Shamash the sun god or Yarih the moon god. Instead they are simply called “the larger” and “the smaller light.”

Third, the sun and moon are simply assigned the role of lighting the earth and ruling the day and night, as the surrogates of God. This is quite a lowly function by ancient Near Eastern standards, though Marduk does something similar in appointing stations for the great gods in *EE* 5.1–22.

Finally, the stars, widely worshiped and often regarded as controllers of human destiny, are mentioned almost as an afterthought: they too are merely creatures.

Outside Gen 1 נֹאֵר “light, lamp” is always used in the Pentateuch **to designate the sanctuary lamp in the tabernacle**: only two other passages, Ezek 32:8; Ps 74:16 use it of the heavenly lights.

The fifth day (1,20-23)

²⁰ And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens."²¹ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.²² And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."²³ And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day. (Gen. 1:20-23 RSV)

ww.20-23 – fish and birds – the abyss is not an abode of monsters and God's enemies

“Living creatures” (נִפְּשׁ חַיִּים) in apposition to “swarming things.” This comprehensive term is used here of water creatures, in v 24 of land animals, in 9:10 of birds and land animals, and 9:16 of man and animals; in other words, of all animate creation in which there is “the breath of life” (נִפְּשׁ חַיִּים; 1:30).

“God blessed them.” Note how here and in 1:28; 2:3; 5:2 a statement about God’s blessing, בָּרַךְ immediately follows a mention of his creating, בָּרָא. **Divine blessing continues God’s benevolent work in creation**, and the writer exploits the verbal similarity between the terms to draw attention to their theological relationship. The blessing of God is one of the great **unifying themes of Genesis**. God blesses animals (1:22), mankind (1:28), the Sabbath (2:3), Adam (5:2), Noah (9:1), and frequently the patriarchs (12:3; 17:16, 20, etc.).¹

The sixth day (1,24-31)

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.,,

(...)³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was **very good**. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

ww.26-31 – the creation of mankind – the 6th day, the crowning of creation:

„let us make” – *pl. majestatis* or self-deliberation, God speaking to his court and angels (Filo of Alexandria) or to Christ.

What’s image and likeness of God in us (ww.26-27)?

Celem – sth hewn. **Demut** – likeness, icon. Referred to the statues of rulers. Both terms, צלם ודמות, appear in the old Aramaic inscription from IXth BC from Tell Fakhariyeh (the statue of king Haddu-yisi).

The meaning of God’s image and likeness in man:

a) intellectual and spiritual abilities – reason, will

⁴ He placed the fear of them in all living beings, and granted them dominion over beasts and birds. ⁵ ⁶ He made for them tongue and eyes; he gave them ears and a mind for thinking. ⁷ He filled them with knowledge and understanding, and showed them good and evil. ⁸ He set his eye upon their hearts to show them the majesty of his works. (Sir. 17:4-8 RSV)

b) relationship son - father Gen 5,3

³ When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. (Gen. 5:3 RSV)

c) eternal life within us Gen 9,5-6; Wis 2,23

²³ for God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, (Wis. 2:23 RSV)

d) man and woman capable of giving life

¹Wenham, Gordon J.: *Word Biblical Commentary : Genesis 1-15*. Dallas : Word, Incorporated, 2002 (Word Biblical Commentary 1), S. 24

e) dominion over the world, man as God's representative, a share in king's authority

3. IMPORTANT MESSAGES OF THE CREATION ACCOUNT

In contrast to the almost random creation recorded as part of Near Eastern mythology, the account in Genesis carefully uses the creation to convey important truths about God's relationship with the universe.

A. Creation Is Good

“And God saw that it was good”: we read this statement four times in the first chapter of Genesis (Gen 1:12, 18, 21, 25). At the end of creation, “behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). The message is clear and simple: creation is good. It is not the work of some evil or incompetent demiurge; the material world was created to be good. And, though it was subsequently wounded and disordered by the sin of Adam, creation is being restored and renewed in Jesus Christ.

B. We Are a Special Creation, Made Like God

Man and woman were made “in the image of God” (Gen 1:27), unlike any other creature. We are not, of course, equal to God, but we have the potential to relate to God and live as part of God's family.

C. God Is Our Father

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,” God says (Gen 1:26). The next time the words “image” and “likeness” appear together, they refer to Adam's begetting his son Seth “in his own likeness, after his image” (Gen 5:3). The language points out that we are related to God the way Seth was related to Adam.

D. The Cosmos Is a Temple

Genesis describes the pristine creation in sacral terms. According to a Jewish tradition, the Garden of Eden is the holy of holies, the most sacred core of the cosmic temple that is the world (Jubilees 8, 19). The seven days of the creation story parallel the narrative of the building of the Tabernacle, which proceeded according to seven commands (Exod 40:16–33), and the erection of the Temple, built in seven years (1 Kgs 6:38). The world is thus viewed as a cosmic sanctuary filled with God's glory (Isa 6:3), and Adam is portrayed as the first priest. (For more on this sacral view of creation, see **Adam**.)

1.2.3. THE TRUTH OF THE CREATION ACCOUNT

A) The Church does not require Christians to believe either that the universe came to be in six literal days or that it did not; Christians are free to interpret the scientific evidence for themselves. Even the Church Fathers were divided. Many insisted on the literal interpretation: “six days” meant six days as we count them today. But even in early centuries, others took a different view. **Saint Clement of Alexandria warned against a literalistic interpretation: “how could creation take place in time, seeing time was born along with things which exist?”** (*Miscellanies*, 6.16). Our days are twenty-four hours long, **Saint Augustine wrote, but**

“we must bear in mind that these days indeed recall the days of creation, but without in any way being really similar to them” (*Gen. Litt.*, 4:27).

B) The truth of Genesis, however, is not at all in doubt. Genesis may use poetic and figurative language, but the important message that language expresses is clear. The universe is God’s creation, and that creation is good. It was creation ex nihilo, out of nothing. Moreover, the creation of man—however it may literally have taken place in time—is a special act by God. Man was created good and given stewardship over creation; he brought evil and disorder into the world by his own disobedience. These truths are basic axioms, so to speak, for the rest of Scripture, and they are fundamental to the Christian faith.

C) The Church has given some guidelines for understanding the scientific data about cosmic and human origins in light of the biblical doctrine. **It has ruled out atheistic evolution**—the belief in blind progress unguided by God (see Pius XII, *Humani Generis* 35). **And the Church has condemned “polygenism,”** the belief that mankind descended from multiple ancestors (see *Humani Generis* 37).

D) The Genesis creation narrative establishes a theological worldview. Its purpose is not scientific, but apologetic, countering the many myths of the ancient Near East. The pagan stories speak of multiple gods, which are somehow embodied in nature; these gods have limitations and needs; the world emerged as a result of a struggle between them; and mankind was created to serve the gods in slavery. Genesis counters this worldview, teaching clearly that there is only one God; that he is not limited by space, time, or nature; that he created the entire cosmos by his mere utterance; and that he made the human race in his own image. **The relationship between God and creation is the basis for all the rest of biblical revelation (CCC 337–44).**²

Gen. Litt. De Genesi ad litteram (On Genesis Literally Interpreted)

CCC Catechism of the Catholic Church

² [Catholic Bible Dictionary](#), 176-178.