

Genesis: Genesis 1 and God, Genesis 1:1-2

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Abstract

This lecture explores the foundational theological teachings of Genesis 1 regarding the nature of God, the universe, and humankind. It highlights God's attributes as the omnipotent, transcendent Creator who is entirely separate from his creation, establishing a unique monotheistic framework distinct from ancient Near Eastern mythologies. Furthermore, the lecture examines the grammatical debate surrounding Genesis 1:1, discussing whether it represents an independent or subordinate clause and addressing various interpretive models such as creation ex nihilo, the gap theory, and the creation of raw matter.

Outline

I. General Teachings about God in Genesis 1:1-2

- A. God's Existence is Assumed
- B. Monotheism is Presupposed and Taught
 - 1. The plural form "Elohim" is a plural of majesty, not polytheism
- C. God is the Omnipotent Creator of the Universe
 - 1. Demonstrated by the repeated phrase "and God said" across creative acts
 - 2. Supported by Hebrews 11:3, showing the universe was formed at God's command
- D. God is Separate from His Creation
 - 1. Distinct from pantheism; the God of Israel is not a nature god
 - 2. G. Ernst Wright (The God Who Acts) highlights that God transcends nature and history, destroying pagan polytheism
 - 3. Combination of elements (existence, monotheism, omnipotence, separation) forms a unique, high God concept

II. General Teachings about the Universe

- A. The Universe is Not Self-Existent or Divine

- 1. Distinct from God and not an extension of the divine essence
- B. The Universe is Not Inherently Evil or Antagonistic to God and Man
 - 1. Stressed by the repeated phrase "and God saw that it was good"
 - 2. Contradicts philosophies that view matter as inherently evil
 - 3. Although affected by the fall, its essential character remains good and pleasing
- C. The Universe Came into Being at the Will of the Divine Creator
- D. Its Formation Follows Orderly Stages (six days of creative activity)

III. Genesis 1-2's General Teaching about Man

- A. Man is Not Self-Existent or Divine (a creature separate from God)
- B. Man Owes His Existence to a Creative Act of God
 - 1. Incompatible with evolutionary theories of origin
- C. Man Comes as the Culmination of the Creative Acts of God
 - 1. Created on the sixth day as the climax of creation
- D. Man is Separate from All the Rest of God's Creation
 - 1. Made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27)
 - 2. Possesses the image of God, making him a spiritual, rational, and moral being
- E. Man has Divine Authority or Dominion over Creation
 - 1. Given dominion over animals and instructed to subdue the earth (Genesis 1:28)

IV. Interpretations of Genesis 1:1

- A. A Majestic Statement with No Parallel in Ancient Extra-Biblical Literature
- B. The Grammatical Debate: Independent vs. Subordinate Clause
 - 1. Independent clause: Rendered as a standalone sentence (e.g., King James, NIV, RSV)
 - 2. Subordinate clause: Rendered as "When God began to create..." (e.g., RSV footnote, NEB)
 - 3. Grammatically, a case can be argued for either interpretation
- C. Genesis 1:1 Taken as an Independent Clause: Three Interpretations
 - 1. Summary of the entire chapter (NIV Study Bible view)
 - a. Functions as a newspaper headline or introductory lead sentence*
 - b. Problem: Verse 2 does not seem like a suitable beginning for the creation narrative*
 - 2. Creation Ex Nihilo (Creation out of Nothing)
 - a. Refers to the creation of the ordered cosmos from nothing*
 - b. Creation account begins in verse 3; verse 2 describes pre-creation state of matter*
 - 3. Original Perfect Creation with a Subsequent Cataclysm (Gap Theory)
 - a. Posits a perfect creation (v. 1) followed by a massive gap in time before v. 2*

- b. Translates "was" in verse 2 as "became" (using the Hebrew verb hayah)*
 - c. Often linked with the fall of Satan causing a cataclysmic change*
 - d. Weston W. Fields (Unformed and Unfilled) argues strongly against this gap theory*
 - e. Geologic time is placed in either: the flood (Gen 6-9), day-age periods, or the gap between v. 1 and v. 2*
 - f. Old Testament support passages (Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah) have interpretive issues and no real link to Gen 1:2*
 - g. Results in the rest of the chapter representing rehabilitation rather than true creation*
4. Creation of Matter (G.C.H. Aalders' view)
- a. Refers to the creation of substance or raw building blocks of the universe*
 - b. "Heavens and earth" designates the unformed essence of the world before the detailed forming in verses 3-31*
 - c. Flows naturally into the unstructured state in verse 2*
- D. Genesis 1:1 as a Subordinate Clause: Two Views
1. Grammatical basis: Centers on whether the first word (bereshit) is in the absolute or construct state
 2. Evidence strongly favoring the absolute state (independent clause):
 - a. Masoretic text accents (disjunctive accent on bereshit)*
 - b. Ancient versions (Septuagint, Syriac, etc.) unanimously translate it as an absolute*
 3. Subordinate clause structures:
 - a. Subordinate to verse 2: "When God began to create..., the earth was..."*
 - b. Subordinate to verse 3, with verse 2 as a parenthesis: "When God began to create... (the earth was...) then God said..." (awkward and complicated)*