

Old Testament Literature

Genesis 1:1–1:2 and the Days of Genesis

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Session 5

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Ted Hildebrandt examines the opening verses of Genesis 1, comparing three primary interpretations of the relationship between verses 1:1 and 1:2: the Gap Theory, the Dependent Clause View, and the Independent Clause View. By analyzing Hebrew grammar, literary structures, and Ancient Near Eastern parallels, Hildebrandt demonstrates that Moses crafted Genesis 1 using contemporary linguistic and cultural forms to deliver a unique monotheistic revelation. The lecture further addresses biblical creation texts, oral tradition, and the three major views regarding the six days of creation (24-Hour Literal Day, Symbolic Framework, and Day-Age theories). Ultimately, Hildebrandt advocates for a hermeneutic focused on original authorial intent, presenting Genesis 1 as a doxology celebrating God's power and majesty rather than a scientific textbook.

Outline

I. Course Introduction and Logistics

- A. Upcoming Exodus reading assignments and select tabernacle chapters
- B. Transcriptions, payment deadlines, and course administration
- C. Review of foundational concepts: inspiration, canonization, transmission, and translation

II. Syntactical Relationships in Genesis 1:1–1:2

- A. The Gap Theory
 - 1. Core premise: Initial creation (v. 1:1) followed by Satan's fall, chaos, and global destruction (v. 1:2)
 - 2. Arguments used by proponents: Interpretation of 'hayah' as 'became' and 'tohu va-vohu' ('formless and empty') as judgment
 - 3. Critique: Lacks contextual evidence for sin in Gen 1–2, misinterprets Hebrew grammar, and has been discredited by modern biblical scholarship
- B. The Dependent Clause View
 - 1. Core premise: Renders verse 1 as 'When God began to create...' (e.g., RSV)

2. Critique: Implies pre-existing eternal matter and energy, reducing God from Creator to a mere shaper

C. The Independent Clause View (Hildebrandt's Position)

1. Syntactical structure: Verse 1 as summary independent clause, Verse 2 as negative circumstantial clause, Verse 3 as main action clause
2. Parallel literary style in Genesis 2:4–7 confirming Moses' characteristic syntax and structural conventions

III. Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Cultural and Literary Context

A. Comparative ANE Literature

1. Parallels in the Gilgamesh Epic (Utnapishtim flood account) and Enuma Elish (Babylonian creation)
2. Critical distinctions: Monotheistic creation by divine word versus polytheistic warfare and cosmic carcass shaping

B. Transmission and Educational Background

1. Role of ancient oral tradition, generational storytelling, and divine corrective revelation
2. Moses' royal Egyptian education and exposure to Fertile Crescent wisdom literature

C. Structural Features of Genesis

1. The 'Toledoth' framework ('These are the generations/account of') dividing Genesis into ten structural units
2. Clay tablet hypothesis and alternating historical-genealogical structure
3. Distinction between original structural markers and medieval chapter divisions (added ca. 1200 A.D.)

IV. Hermeneutics, Language, and Purpose of Genesis 1

A. Hebrew Language and Accommodation

1. Hebrew as an adapted Canaanite dialect used to communicate divine truth
2. Divine accommodation to human language and contemporary phenomenological expressions (e.g., 'four corners of the earth')

B. Primary Purpose and Original Intent

1. Hermeneutic of original intent: Genesis 1 as an anti-polytheistic polemic rather than an anti-evolutionary text
2. Genesis 1 as a doxology celebrating the majesty, sovereignty, and goodness of God

C. Theological Themes and Wordplay

1. Creation 'ex nihilo' (out of nothing) by the divine word (Psalm 33:6; Psalm 136)
2. Hebrew wordplay in Adam ('Adamah' / ground / 'Dusty') and Eve ('Havah' / life / 'mother of all living')

V. Interpretive Frameworks for the 'Days' of Genesis

A. Literal 24-Hour Day Theory (Young Earth Creationism)

1. Posits six 24-hour solar days and a young earth (~10,000–20,000 years)

2. Arguments: Definition of 'yom' in Gen 1:5, Sabbath command in Exodus 20, and numerical modifier usage ('day + number')

3. Concept of 'appearance of age' in creation

B. Symbolic / Framework Day Theory

1. Posits 'yom' as a logical, literary, or revelational framework (e.g., seven days of vision revealed to Moses on Sinai)

2. Focuses on theological structure rather than strict chronological sequence

C. Day-Age Theory (Old Earth Creationism)

1. Posits 'yom' as denoting long epochs or flexible ages, allowing for an ancient universe (~13.7 billion years)

2. Arguments: Semantic range of 'yom', non-solar nature of Days 1–3, and extensive sequential activities on Day 6

D. Practical Conclusion

1. Scripture leaves the exact age of the earth unstated

2. Call for Christian unity, charity, and focusing on primary theological truths ('major on the majors')