

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 5, Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, Days of Genesis 1

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Welcome to the Deep Dive. This time we're diving into Genesis, specifically the creation account in Chapter 1. You know, you gave us a lot to work with here. We've got lecture notes, biblical excerpts, even some, like, ancient Mesopotamian myths.

Fascinating. It seems like you really want to get to the bottom of this. Yeah.

Not just like, what does the Bible say about creation, but how it says it, you know? The whole historical and literary context. It is a fascinating approach. Yeah.

And it really speaks to, you know, how powerful these texts are. I mean, we're talking about, like, the fundamental questions here. Origins, the nature of time, the intersection of faith, and ancient cosmology.

Right. Okay, well, right off the bat, I'm kind of struck by all the different theories about the days in Genesis 1. Some people, they take it literally, you know, 24-hour periods. Others say, hold on, maybe they're symbolic, or they represent vast ages.

What's your take on this whole debate? Well, your source material actually highlights three main interpretations. Each one has its own arguments, you know? Okay. Let's start with the 24-hour literal day theory.

Okay. So this view basically says that those days of creation correspond to, you know, like the solar days that we experience now. Okay.

One of their strongest arguments, I'd say, is the word *yom* in Hebrew, which is usually translated as day. It's specifically defined as a light and darkness cycle. Right.

Like in Genesis 1.5. Right. And the whole, like the whole pattern of day one, day two, all the way through the chapter, it seems to back that up, right? Exactly. Like a regular day.

And, you know, people who like this view, they often point to the Sabbath, which is a literal 24-hour day of rest. Right. Commanded by God.

So they see that as further evidence. Okay. But how do they, how do they make that work with what science tells us? Like the Earth is billions of years old.

Well, that's where the other interpretations come in. The symbolic day theory, for example, it proposes that the days aren't meant to be like actual time periods at all. Okay.

Bernard Ramm was a theologian known for his work on faith and science. He argued that these days are more like a literary framework. So a way for Moses to present these stages of creation, but in a more structured and symbolic way.

So more like phases of creation, not necessarily bound by time. Precisely. Okay.

And then we have the day age theory, which really relies on how flexible the Hebrew word yom is. It could mean a 24-hour day. Yeah.

But it can also refer to these longer undefined periods. Right, right. Like the day of the Lord.

Exactly. Oh, and Psalm 90.4, it even says like a thousand years or like a day to the Lord. That always makes me laugh.

Talk about a long workday. Exactly. So the day-age people, they argue that these days could be like vast geological ages.

Yeah. And that would align the creation account with scientific timelines. They might also point out that a literal solar day wouldn't even be possible until after the sun was created on day four.

That is a really good point. What kind of day could it have been before the sun? And if those days were actually like eons, maybe that would... Dealing with the loneliness and then finding Eve. Squeezing all that into a 24-hour period does seem a bit much, doesn't it? I see your point.

It does raise some questions about how limited a purely literal interpretation can be. Wow. It's amazing.

All this debate, all this discussion, just from those first few verses of Genesis. You know what I find really interesting is you gave us those ancient Mesopotamian myths alongside the biblical text. Right.

When I was reading about Utnapishtim in the Epic of Gilgamesh, building an ark, sending out birds after the flood. It reminded me so much of the Noah story. It makes you wonder, like, did Moses just kind of borrow from these older tales? That's a question that comes up a lot.

And it's true. There are some really striking parallels between the Genesis creation account and those Mesopotamian myths, like the Epic of Gilgamesh or the Enuma Elish. Those similarities probably come from these shared ancient oral traditions about a global flood.

That would have been everywhere back then. But we should be careful about just assuming that Moses was directly borrowing. So it's not a simple case of plagiarism.

Not at all. The stories might share some basic elements, but the differences are just as big. Like what? The way the Bible portrays God, for example.

The purpose of creation. Yeah. The relationship between humans and the divine.

It's all radically different from those Mesopotamian accounts. OK. Think of it this way.

Two chefs can use the same ingredients, but end up making totally different dishes. Right. I get it.

It's not just about the ingredients. It's how you use them and the vision you're going for. Precisely.

And we have to think about Moses's background, too. He was raised by Hebrew parents, but educated in the wisdom of Egypt. So he had all these different influences.

So he would have been exposed to a whole range of ideas and literary traditions. And that raises an interesting question. Could God have used all that pre-existing stuff to get his truth across? It's like God speaking through the donkey.

Right. In Numbers 22. Yeah.

Truth can come from anywhere. Exactly. So instead of seeing these parallels as a problem, maybe we can see them as evidence of God working within that specific cultural and historical context.

That makes the text feel more grounded, more human. That's a good way to put it. All right.

Well, speaking of the text itself, let's look at the literary style of Genesis. One thing that stands out is the Toledot. These phrases mean this is the account of.

They're like dividers throughout the book, marking off different sections. Right. So it's like Moses is giving us his own chapter headings.

Right. Centuries before chapters and verses were added. Exactly.

It shows how Moses himself organized the text. Yeah. And it shows how those chapter and verse numbers, the ones we see today, were added around 1200 A.D. They can sometimes mess up the original flow.

Really? Yeah. Like, for example, the seventh day of creation is described in Genesis 2.1 to 3. But it should really be part of the creation week narrative from chapter one. Whoa.

I never realized that. It's like they split the story in half. Kind of.

Yeah. And it really shows you how important it is to understand the original structure or context of the Bible. OK.

And another interesting thing is the way Genesis goes back and forth between these historical narratives and genealogy. Right. Those long lists of "begats," they might seem kind of boring, but they were super important back then.

They were a way to establish lineage and identity. It's interesting to think how much that meant to them back then. But it makes you realize that in our modern way of reading, you know, we're so focused on plot and action that we can miss those subtle things.

You're absolutely right. And speaking of things that can be easily misinterpreted, let's talk about a common concern that comes up when we discuss Genesis and its ancient context. OK.

The question of scientific accuracy. You mean those parts of the Bible that seem to contradict what science tells us today, like the phrase four corners of the earth. It makes it sound like the Bible is saying the earth is flat.

It's these moments that make it hard to reconcile faith with modern science. I understand. But it's really important to remember that Genesis wasn't written to be a science textbook.

It's a theological text. It's mainly about conveying truths about God, creation, and humanity. So we need to think about the original audience.

Yeah. And how they understood the world. Exactly.

It's like how we still use the phrase sunrise, even though scientifically we know the sun doesn't actually rise. Language changes, but the meaning stays the same. The same goes for the Bible.

That makes a lot of sense. It frees us up to appreciate that poetic and symbolic language of Genesis without getting stuck on those literal interpretations that might not agree with what we know from science today. All right.

Well, let's move on to something I find really fascinating. OK. The wordplay in Adam and Eve's names.

Oh, yeah. In Hebrew, Adam was formed from the ground, Adama, and he's named Adam, and Eve, Hava, meaning life-giver. She's named right after Adam Stold.

He'll return to dust. It's like a hidden layer of meaning. It makes you wonder if those insights were obvious to, like, the original audience or if it's something scholars have uncovered.

It definitely points to a deeper meaning. You might not get that from just a translation. But beyond the clever wordplay, there's a deeper theological point here.

Right. That connection between Adam's name and the ground, along with Eve being the mother of all living. It suggests this connection between humanity and creation, that cycle of life and death, and the hope that even though we're mortal, life continues.

It's those small details that really make the text come alive. It's like Moses is inviting us to dig deeper, look beyond the surface, and discover all that richness hidden in the language. Precisely.

And that's what makes studying these ancient texts so rewarding. There's always more to uncover, more layers to explore. So in this first part of our dive, we've covered a lot: those different theories about the days of creation, the parallels with those Mesopotamian myths, how important it is to understand the literary style and historical context of Genesis, and even the wordplay hidden in the Hebrew.

It's incredible how much depth and complexity we can find just in those first two chapters. What I find really compelling is that the Bible doesn't shy away from these complexities. It encourages us to engage with them, explore different perspectives, and appreciate the wonder of creation through different lenses.

It's not about finding all the answers, is it? It's about asking the right questions, which is what makes this deep dive so exciting. But before we get to part two, I'm curious about those ancient Egyptian creation myths, you know, that weren't in the original stack of material. But after talking about the Mesopotamian myths, I can't help but wonder what kind of similarities and differences we might find there.

I mean, could looking at those myths give us even more insight into that cultural and intellectual world that shaped the Genesis account? That's an excellent question, and it leads us perfectly into the next part of our exploration, comparing all these different creation stories from across the ancient world. It can reveal a lot about how humans have always tried to understand where we came from, and it might just make us appreciate even more that unique message that Genesis brings to the table. Welcome back to our deep dive into Genesis chapter one.

I'm really excited to dig into those ancient Egyptian creation myths you mentioned. After all that stuff about the Mesopotamian parallels, I'm wondering if the Egyptians also had stories about a global flood or, you know, gods creating humans from clay. They certainly did.

The ancient Egyptians had a really rich and complex cosmology with all these different creation narratives. Each one reflected different regional beliefs and theological perspectives. But even with all that diversity, we find some interesting common threads with Genesis.

Like what? For example, both the Egyptian and biblical accounts feature this idea of primordial chaos, you know, before creation even happened. So this idea of a formless void, like a blank slate before creation unfolds, that wasn't just a Hebrew thing. It seems like it was.

A pretty common theme in ancient creation myths, like in the Egyptian creation myth from Hermopolis. We've got these eight primordial gods representing forces like darkness and infinity, hiddenness, all existing before the emergence of order and light. This kind of reminds you of the description of the earth in Genesis 1.2. Formless and empty.

So it's like these ancient cultures, they had this sense of something existing before the universe as we know it. It's fascinating, isn't it? Yeah, it is. This shared human curiosity about origins, trying to reach back beyond what we know and grapple with this ultimate mystery of before.

Did the Egyptians also have a concept similar to God speaking creation into existence? That always felt so powerful to me in Genesis. You've hit on another interesting parallel. In the Egyptian creation myth from Heliopolis, the god Atum creates the world by speaking the names of things, bringing them into being through the power of his voice.

It really echoes the Genesis account where God speaks, and creation happens. Let there be light, let there be firmament, and so on. It suggests this deep belief in the power of language, like words can shape reality.

Maybe they understood the power of language in a way that we've lost with our modern focus on scientific explanation. You mentioned gods creating humans from clay. He was said to mold humans on a potter's wheel, shaping their destiny, breathing life into them. That sounds so similar to God forming Adam from dust. In Genesis 2.7, it seems like we found a pattern here.

Primordial chaos, divine speech as a creative force, even gods getting their hands dirty to create humanity. Yes, these shared motifs point to these common cultural and maybe even psychological threads running through all these ancient creation myths, but it's not just about copying, right? There are big differences in worldview and theology. Like what? Well, Egyptian creation myths are polytheistic, multiple gods competing for power and influence.

Genesis, though, presents a radical monotheism, one God as the sole creator, sovereign over everything. Right, it's not just about how creation happened, but about the nature of God and how humanity relates to the Creator. Exactly.

So when we're trying to understand Genesis in its ancient context, what can we learn from comparing it with these Egyptian myths? Well, for one thing, it shows that the Bible wasn't written in isolation. It came out of a world full of different beliefs and traditions about creation. Understanding those influences helps us see how the Bible draws on and also subverts those existing narratives to present its own unique and powerful vision.

It's like Moses is having a conversation with those older myths. Yeah. He's acknowledging those familiar elements, but ultimately offering a different, deeper perspective.

Exactly. And by studying these parallels, we get a better understanding, not just of Genesis, but of this shared human desire to understand our origins and our place in the universe. That makes a lot of sense.

Okay, so let's go back to the structure of Genesis itself. Remember those little dots? Those phrases that act as dividers, marking different sections. Yeah, those.

Some scholars believe they actually hold clues to the sources Moses might have used. Wait, you're saying there could be lost scrolls or ancient texts woven into Genesis? It might not be quite that dramatic, but remember, we're talking about a time long before printing presses and books. Oral tradition was everything back then.

Written documents were really precious. Moses probably drew on lots of different things. Oral traditions, genealogies, maybe even fragments of older writings that had been passed down.

So it's less about finding some specific lost text and more about recognizing that Genesis is like a tapestry moving together from different threads of tradition. Exactly. Those dots they might be pointing to.

Where those threads are joined together, it gives us a peek into how Moses put it all together. That's really interesting. It shows how complex and rich the biblical text really is.

All those layers of meaning. It's a good reminder that the Bible we have today came from this long and complicated process of transmission and interpretation. It makes you think about what those lost sources might have said.

Were there even wilder creation myths that didn't make it in? It's fun to think about. But even without those lost sources, we could still appreciate how artistic and theologically deep Genesis is. And one thing that always stands out to me is its poetic beauty.

It's not just a dry history book. It's full of vivid imagery and powerful metaphors. I've always loved the rhythm of the seven days of creation.

It's almost hypnotic, the way it builds. Exactly. That rhythmic structure.

The repetition and symmetry. It evokes this sense of order and purpose and the language. With all the descriptions of light and darkness, water and land, sky and sea, it draws you into the creative act.

You can almost experience the wonder and beauty of the world coming to be. It's like we're right there with God, watching the universe being born. It's a truly immersive experience.

And that poetic beauty adds another layer of meaning. It's not just about understanding it with your mind, but also with your heart and imagination. That's beautiful.

But even as we appreciate the artistry of Genesis, we can't ignore that tension that sometimes comes up between its account of creation and what we know from science today. We've talked about understanding the historical context, not taking everything literally, but there are still those moments where science and scripture seem to clash. How do we deal with that? It's the classic science versus religion debate.

We know the earth isn't flat, but the Bible talks about four corners, which can be a real stumbling block for people. It's a valid concern, but I think it comes from misunderstanding what the text is really about. Genesis, like a lot of ancient texts, wasn't written to be a science textbook.

It's trying to convey theological truths about God, creation, and humanity. So it's more about conveying spiritual truths than giving a scientific account of how the universe came to be. Exactly.

The language used reflects the way people back then understood the world. It's like reading Shakespeare and expecting him to understand modern physics. We have to appreciate the work within its historical context.

So when we see those parts that don't seem to agree with science, it's a reminder to shift our focus. Look beyond the literal meaning and think about the deeper message. Exactly.

It's about reading with discernment, recognizing the literary devices and the cultural context that shapes the text. And speaking of literary devices, there's one that's often overlooked. Wordplay and symbolism.

We've already talked about the significance of Adam and Eve's names, but the Hebrew text is full of these subtle layers of meaning that you can easily miss in translation. You're making me want to learn Hebrew. Can you give me an example of this wordplay? Sure.

Think about the word create in Hebrew, bara. It's used in Genesis 1.1. It's a special word reserved for God's creative act. It emphasizes the ex nihilo aspect of creation, meaning that God brought everything into being from nothing.

So it's not just about shaping or forming something that already exists, but about making something totally new out of pure nothingness. Exactly. And that's just one example.

The text is full of these puns and allusions, wordplay that adds so much depth and nuance to the story. Give me another one. The word for man, ish, is closely related to the word for fire, esh.

It's like a hint at the dynamic and potentially destructive nature of humanity. Wow, the language itself is full of meaning. It is.

It shows you how much we miss when we just rely on translations. It's true. Studying the original Hebrew opens up a whole new level of understanding and appreciation for the text.

But even without knowing Hebrew, we can still appreciate how poetically beautiful Genesis is. It's not just a historical account; it's a work of art with vivid imagery and powerful metaphors. I've always loved that rhythmic structure of the seven days of creation.

It's almost hypnotic, the way it builds and crescendos, culminating in the creation of humanity. Yes, that rhythmic structure with this repetition and symmetry creates this feeling of order and purpose in the language. With all those descriptions of light and darkness, water and land, the sky and sea, it draws the reader in, letting us experience the wonder and beauty of the world coming to be.

It's like we're right there alongside God, witnessing the birth of the universe. Exactly. And that poetic beauty adds another layer to the text.

It's not just about engaging our minds, but also our hearts and imaginations. I love that. But even as we appreciate the artistry of Genesis, we can't ignore the tension that sometimes comes up in its account of creation.

And what we understand from science today, right? We've talked about understanding the historical context. Yeah. And not taking everything literally.

But there are still those moments where science and scripture seem to clash. How do we navigate that? It's a question that's challenged theologians and scientists for centuries. And there's no easy answer, no one-size-fits-all approach.

Some people might emphasize the metaphorical nature of the Bible, arguing that Genesis shouldn't be read literally. Others might focus on the limitations of our scientific understanding, acknowledging that we don't have all the answers and that there might be things that science, as we know it, can't fully grasp. So it's about finding a balance, a way to respect both the Bible and scientific inquiry.

Exactly. And ultimately, I think it comes down to faith, a willingness to hold both science and scripture in tension, recognizing that God is the author of both and that truth can be found in unexpected places. It's that willingness to embrace mystery and paradox that I find so appealing about faith.

It's not about having all the answers, but about continuing to ask questions, to search, to grow in understanding. And sometimes those moments of tension where our beliefs are challenged can be the most fertile ground for spiritual growth. I couldn't agree more.

It's in those moments of wrestling, of questioning and seeking, that we encounter the mystery and majesty of God's creation in new and profound ways. That's really beautiful. Okay, so before we wrap up part two of our deep dive, I want to hear your thoughts on those ancient Egyptian creation myths.

They weren't in the original material, but after our conversation about Mesopotamian myths, I can't help but wonder what similarities and differences we might find there. I on the cultural and intellectual world that shaped the Genesis account. That's an excellent question.

And it leads us perfectly into the next stage of our exploration. Comparing different creation stories from the ancient world can give us a lot of insight into that shared human desire to understand our origins. And it might even give us a new appreciation for the unique message that Genesis offers.

Welcome back to the final part of our Genesis deep dive. That question you posed at the end of part two really got me thinking: what if the creation account is more about proclaiming God's sovereignty than outlining a strict timeline? It's a perspective that lets us appreciate the theological depth of the text without getting bogged down in all those scientific debates. Right, right.

So let's focus on that theological message. What is Genesis really saying about God? Okay, I'm ready. Let's dive in.

First and foremost, Genesis establishes God as the sole creator, the sovereign ruler of the entire universe. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth- that opening line. It's a bold declaration of monotheism, a direct challenge to the polytheistic beliefs that were everywhere in the ancient world.

It's like Moses is making it clear right from the start. There's only one God, and he's in control. Exactly.

And it's not just about his power as creator, but also about his character. He's shown as a God of order and purpose out of that formless void. He creates structure and beauty, separating light from darkness, water from land.

He fills the world with all these different life forms. And then finally, the creation of humanity made in God's image. That's always fascinated me.

What does it really mean? It's one of the most important ideas in Genesis: humanity being made in God's image. It means we have a unique dignity and responsibility. We're called to reflect God's character, to be stewards of creation, to take care of the earth.

So it's not just about God creating things. It's about a relationship, a covenant between humanity and the divine. Right.

It sets the stage for everything that follows in the biblical story. You mentioned earlier that those toledots, those phrases like this is the account of, might show that Moses used older narratives or genealogies. You talk more about that.

Of course. We have to remember that back then, oral tradition was how people shared knowledge. Moses would have known all these stories, genealogies, poems that had been passed down for generations.

It's amazing to think about. It is. So are you saying that those toledots mark the spots where Moses combined those different sources? Some scholars think so.

Like he's creating this unified narrative out of all these fragments. So he's like an editor, carefully choosing and arranging these ancient traditions to create a story of creation. And those toledots, they're like little glimpses into how he put it all together.

It makes you think about what those other stories might have said. It does. The ones that didn't make it in.

It's fun to imagine. But even without those lost sources, we can still see how beautiful and theologically deep Genesis is. And I've always been struck by its poetic beauty.

It's not just a dry history. It's full of vivid imagery and powerful metaphors. The way it describes the world coming into being is almost hypnotic.

It is that rhythmic structure with the repetition and symmetry. It creates this feeling of order and purpose, and the language itself, with all the references to light and darkness, water and land, sky and sea. It's so evocative and symbolic.

It makes you think about the text and all these different levels, not just intellectually, but emotionally and imaginatively too. It's like a symphony in words, a masterpiece. I like that.

And that poetic beauty helps us understand the impact Genesis has had on art, literature, and culture. It's a text that still inspires us today. It makes us think about our place in the universe and our relationship with God.

So we've explored Genesis in so many different ways, historically, literally, theologically, even scientifically. As we wrap up this deep dive, what's the one thing you want our listener to remember? I think the most important thing is to see that Genesis is complex and multifaceted. It's a text that continues to speak to us.

Even after all these years, it's a story about where we came from, about our connection to God, about what it means to be human. And while there might be debates about how to interpret it and how it relates to science, its core message remains powerful and timeless. It

invites us to grapple with those big questions, to appreciate the wonder and mystery of creation and to find our place in the cosmos.

It's been an amazing journey exploring all these different aspects of Genesis. Thank you for guiding us through it. It's been my pleasure.

And to our listeners, I encourage you to keep exploring Genesis. Don't be afraid to ask questions, to challenge what you think you know. And to discover your own understanding of this powerful and enduring text.

And remember, every deep dive is a journey of discovery. So keep exploring, keep questioning, and keep diving deep into the world of knowledge and ideas. Until next time.