
THE STORY OF CREATION

1:1 – 2:3

INTRODUCTION

Structure

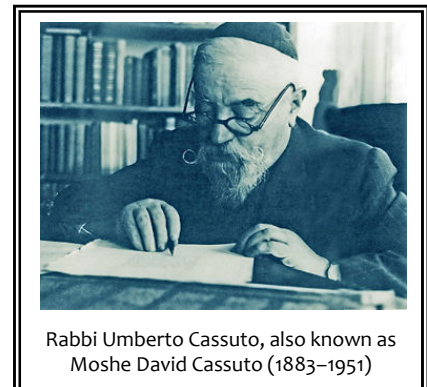
The original Hebrew text was not only *not* divided into chapters and verses (as we have mentioned before), but it was not even divided into paragraphs. The paragraph divisions we have in Genesis in our English Bibles vary according to translator or interpreter. Verbal cues from the text suggest the following literary units:

Introduction	1:1-2	
First paragraph	1:3-5	Creation of light
Second paragraph	1:6-8	Creation of sea and sky
Third paragraph	1:9-13	Creation of earth and plants
Fourth paragraph	1:14-19	Creation of sun, moon, and stars
Fifth paragraph	1:20-23	Creation of fish and fowl
Sixth paragraph	1:24-31	Creation of land animals and man
Seventh paragraph	2:1-3	Consecration of the seventh day

This is the most natural division of the text. After the introduction, each literary unit begins with the words, “And God said...”, and ends with, “And there was evening and there was morning, the *x* day.”

Umberto Cassuto makes the following observations on this portion of the text.

The structure of our section is based on a system of numerical harmony. Not only is the number *seven* fundamental to its main theme, but it also serves to determine many of its details. Both to the Israelites and to the Gentiles, in the East and also in the West—but especially in the East—it was the number of *perfection* and the basis of ordered arrangement; and particular importance attached to it in the symbolism of numbers. The



work of the Creator which is marked by absolute perfection and flawless systematic orderliness, is distributed over seven days: six days of labour and the seventh day set aside for the enjoyment of the completed task... [A] system of *seven consecutive days* was considered a perfect *period* [unit of time] in which to develop an important work, the action lasting six days and reaching its conclusion and outcome on the seventh day. (Cassuto, *Genesis: From Adam to Noah*, pp. 12-13)

Cassuto points out how the number seven is woven into the details of the passage, as well.

(a). After the introductory verse (i 1), the section is divided into *seven* paragraphs, each of which appertains to one of the seven days. An obvious indication of this division is to be seen in the recurring sentence, *And there was evening and there was morning, such-and-such a day*. Hence the Masoretes were right in placing an open paragraph [i.e., one that begins on a new line] after each of these verses. Other ways of dividing the section suggested by some modern scholars are unsatisfactory.

(b-d). Each of the three nouns that occur in the first verse and express the basic concepts of the section, *viz God...heavens...earth*, are repeated in the section a given number of times that is a multiple of *seven*: Thus the name of *God* occurs thirty-five times, that is, five times *seven*...; *earth* is found twenty-one times, that is, three times *seven*; similarly *heavens*...appears twenty-one times. (Cassuto, *Genesis*, p. 14)

(f). The terms *light* and *day* are found, in all, *seven* times in the first paragraph, and there are *seven* references to *light* in the fourth paragraph.

(g). *Water* is mentioned *seven* times in the course of paragraphs two and three.

(h). In the fifth and sixth paragraphs forms of the word *hayya* [rendered 'living' or 'beasts'] occur *seven* times.

(i). The expression *it was good* appears *seven* times (the seventh time – *very good*).

(j). The first verse has *seven* words.

(k). The second verse contains fourteen words – twice *seven*.

(l). In the *seventh* paragraph, which deals with the *seventh* day, there occur the following three consecutive sentences (three for emphasis), each of which consists of *seven* words and contains in the middle the expression *the seventh day*:

And on THE SEVENTH DAY God finished His work which He had done, and He rested on THE SEVENTH DAY from all His work which He had done. So God blessed THE SEVENTH DAY and hallowed it

(m). The words in the seventh paragraph total thirty-five—five times seven.

To suppose that all this is mere coincidence is not possible. (Cassuto, *Genesis*, pp. 13-15)

Purpose

Genesis is a highly condensed account of redemptive history. In the nature of the case it would be impossible to record *everything* that happened in the nearly 2,400 years it covers. Some events would naturally have to be omitted. Material selected for inclusion must have been selected because it serves the purpose for which the book was written. Of any given passage of Scripture, therefore, we must ask ourselves the question, “Of all the things that could have been chosen by God to be recorded for our instruction, why did he choose *this*?” Umberto Cassuto offers the following answer with respect to the account of creation:

“The purpose of the Torah in this section is to teach us that the whole world and all that it contains were created by the word of the One God, according to His will, which operates without restraint.” (Umberto Cassuto, *Genesis*, p. 7)

And why should this be important for us to know? In order that we might understand our rightful place as creatures of the almighty and eternal God, and render him the obedience which is properly due from the creature to the Creator.

Know that the LORD Himself is God!

It is He who has made us,
and not we ourselves (Ps. 100:3, NASB).

The medieval French rabbi, Schlomo Yitzhaki, or Rashi (1040-1105), connects the account of creation specifically to Israel’s expectation of receiving the Promised Land.

The reason for commencing with Creation is to justify the allocation of the Holy Land to Israel; for God being the Creator of the world, He can assign any part of it to whomsoever He desires. (Rashi in *The Soncino Chumash*, p. 1)

(1:1) In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

"The existence of God can be proved in five ways." – Thomas Aquinas

It is noteworthy that the Bible does not begin with a philosophical proof for the existence of God *a la* Anselm's ontological argument or the "five ways" of Thomas Aquinas. Nor do we find any such argument anywhere in Scripture. God's existence is assumed from the beginning and throughout.

This is not at all difficult to explain. The Torah was written in the midst of a remarkable Divine intervention in the course of human history – a self-revelation of God in the exodus of Israel from Egypt and the giving of his law at Mt. Sinai, with all the attending miracles. A philosophical argument for his existence was wholly unnecessary because by these events his existence was made obvious.

Of Creation in General

The universe owes its origin (as well as its continued existence) to the will of the almighty and eternal God.

The opening words of the Bible present us with the most important principle of human knowledge: God created the universe. (Gary North, *The Dominion Covenant*, p. 1)

This simple sentence denies atheism; for it assumes the being of God. It denies polytheism, and, among its various forms, the doctrine of two eternal principles, the one good and the other evil; for it confesses the One Eternal Creator. It denies materialism; for it asserts the creation of matter.

It denies pantheism; for it assumes the existence of God before all things, and apart from them. It denies fatalism; for it involves the freedom of the Eternal Being." (James Murphy, p. 30)

Other Ancient Accounts of Creation

There are a great many other ancient accounts of creation. We should not be surprised by this. In fact, we should be surprised if this were not so. There can be little doubt that God explained the basic facts of creation to Adam, who would have very naturally passed the story on to his sons, and they to their sons, and so on, until the time of Noah. Noah, in turn, would have passed the story on to Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And from them the story would be passed on to future generations until the time of the judgment of God at Babel. From there, the story would find expression in the many different cultures that arose from the confusion of languages and the dispersion of the race over the face of the earth. Naturally the story would be preserved with varying degrees of faithfulness from culture to culture and from generation to generation. In some cultures, no doubt, the story was forgotten altogether. It would not be long, however, before some speculative theory would be substituted in its place because the subject of origins is one that naturally commends itself to thoughtful people.

Some of the more noteworthy creation accounts from the biblical world include the Babylonian *Enûma Eliš* or *Epic of Creation*, and *Theogony* by the Greek writer, Hesiod.

The Biblical account of creation differs remarkably from other ancient accounts.

...the *contents* of our account of creation...differ as widely from all other cosmogonies as truth from fiction. Those of heathen nations are either hylozoistical, deducing the origin of life and living beings from some primeval matter; or pantheistical, regarding the whole world as emanating from a common divine substance; or mythological, tracing both gods and men to a chaos or world-egg. They do not even rise to the notion of a creation, much less to the knowledge of an almighty God, as the Creator of all things. (Keil and F. Delitzsch, p. 39)

All kinds of wondrous stories about the creation of the world were wide-

spread throughout the lands of the East, and many of them assumed a literary form in epic poems or other compositions... They began, as a rule with a Theogony, that is, with the origin of the gods, the genealogy of the deities who preceded the birth of the world and mankind; and they told of the antagonism between this god and that god, of frictions that arose from these clashes of will, and of mighty wars that were waged by the gods. They connected the genesis of the world with the genesis of the gods and with the hostilities and wars between them; and they identified the different parts of the universe with given deities or with certain parts of their bodies... Then came the Torah and soared aloft, as on eagles' wings, above all these notions. Not many gods but One God; not Theogony, for a god has no family tree; not wars nor strife nor the clash of wills, but only One Will, which rules over everything, without the slightest let or hindrance; not a deity associated with nature and identified with it wholly or in part, but a God who stands absolutely above nature, and outside of it, and nature and all its constituent elements, even the sun and all the other entities, be they never so exalted, are only His creatures, made according to His will. (Umberto Cassuto, *Genesis: From Adam to Noah*, pp. 7-8)

Secular Creation Myths

Moderns also have their creation myths, although they are not often recognized as such because they are presented under the guise of science.

The most common secular creation myth is the Big Bang theory, which advances the notion that all matter and energy that currently exist in the entire universe was once compressed into an infinitesimal point which for eternity past existed in a relatively stable condition. About 14 billion years ago, however, and for reasons still unknown, this concentration of matter exploded, and the cosmos itself came into being and has been in a process of evolution ever since, with stars and planets, solar systems and galaxies forming as a result of the initial "big bang."

Others advance the notion that the cosmos is eternal, and that its current state and appearance is similar to what has always been.

Still others hold to an oscillating universe, believing the cosmos had no initial

creation, nor displays the characteristic of changelessness, but undergoes alternating periods of expansion and contraction. We are currently in a period of expansion, resulting from the latest "big bang." This will be followed in time by another contraction, or "big crunch." Gravitational attraction will eventually cause all matter to collapse on itself again. This will be followed in turn by another "big bang," etc.

The evolution of the cosmos is the larger context in which the evolution of life is believed to have occurred. According to the proponents of big bang cosmogony, the earth was formed four and half billion years ago, and life emerged a few hundred million years later. The first living organism is believed to have been a single-celled prokaryote. From this original living cell, all life is believed to have evolved by a process of "descent with modification."

Cosmic Personalism vs. Impersonalism

What all of these secular creation myths have in common is that they carry with them by implication the notion of an impersonal cosmos. The difference between this and the conception of the universe as it is given to us in the pages of Scripture could hardly be more remarkable.

Secular creation myths, based as they are upon the idea that matter is the only reality, conceive of the cosmos as ultimately an impersonal place that functions like one vast machine. But Scripture teaches us to think otherwise.

God did not create a self-sustaining universe which is now left to operate in terms of autonomous laws of nature. The universe is not a giant mechanism, like a clock, which God created and wound up at the beginning of time. Ours is not a mechanistic world, nor is it an autonomous biological entity, growing according to some genetic code of the cosmos. Ours is a world which is actively sustained by God on a fulltime basis (Job 38-41). All creation is inescapably personal and theocentric. (North, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*, pp. 1-2)

The universe is suffused with the personality of God. The world was not only *created* by God in the beginning but is daily *sustained* by his power. The laws of nature (so-

called), which are thought to govern the world, and are believed to arise from properties inherent within matter, are better thought of as being merely descriptive of God's usual way of working. We say, for instance, that two particles attract each other according to the product of their masses and inversely according to the square of their distance. This we call the law of gravitation, and we assume that the attraction between the particles arises from properties inherent within matter. It is better to say that this "law" is rather a statistical analysis of God's usual way of working. It is he who "upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3), he in whom all things hold together" (Col. 1:17), he in whom all things live and move and have their being (Acts 17:28).

It is God who "makes his sun [to] rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45; cf. Job 38:12-13), or on one city and not on another (Amos 4:7). It is he who "causes the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate" (Ps. 104:14), granting either fruitful seasons or times of famine (Gen. 41:25-28; cf. Acts 14:17; Ps. 147:15-18).

In short, God works all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:11). There is, therefore, "no phenomenon or event in the creation which is independent from God" (Gary North, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*, p. 2).