

02. Genesis 1:1-19





During the Babylonian Exile in the 6th century BC the exiles from Judah came in contact with the religious ideas and cult of Babylon. They were stunned at how primitive the Babylonians were.

Psalm 115:2-8

- ²Why do the nations say, 'Where is their God?'
- ³Our God is in the heavens and answers to no one.
- ⁴Their gods are crafted by hand, mere silver and gold.
- ⁵They have mouths, but do not speak;
eyes, but do not see.
- ⁶They have ears, but do not hear;
noses, but do not smell.
- ⁷They have hands, but do not feel;
feet, but do not walk.
No sound comes forth from their hollow throats.
- ⁸Those who make them are like them;
as are all who trust in them.

Isaiah 44:18-20

“They do not know, nor do they comprehend; for their eyes are shut, so that they cannot see, and their minds as well, so that they cannot understand. No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, “Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals, I roasted meat and have eaten. Now shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?” He feeds on ashes; a deluded mind has led him astray, and he cannot save himself or say, “Is not this thing a fraud?”

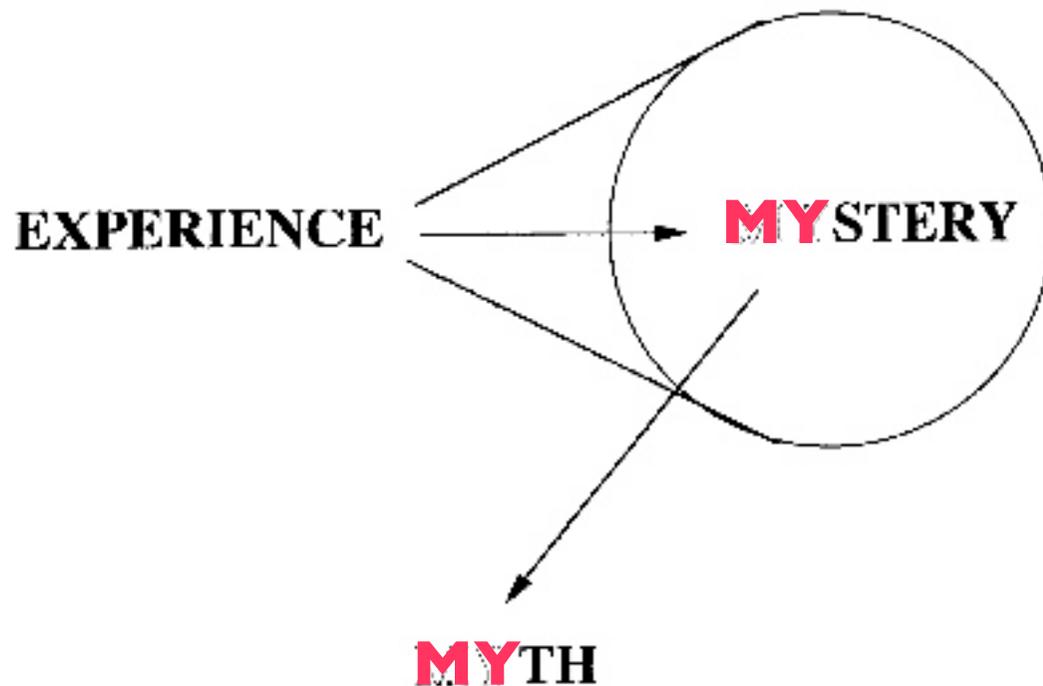
- New Year festival to the Babylonian god, Marduk, and the dramatic presentation of the *Enuma Elish* creation myth
- In the beginning there was nothing but the divine pair Apsū and Tiamat. From these primordial deities several generations of gods were begotten, but the repose of Apsū was disturbed by the secondary gods, whom he therefore decided to destroy, a proposal rejected by his consort, Tiamat. The wise god Ea then discovers the plan and takes pre-emptive action by killing Apsū with the help of magic.

- The birth of Marduk follows, and his many attributes are described. Meanwhile, Tiamat prepares for battle to avenge the death of her consort, and appoints Kingu as head of the divine assembly, leader of her army, and keeper of the tablets of destiny. Since the gods are afraid to take on Tiamat, Marduk, also known as Bēl, agrees to do so with the condition that he is appointed supreme god in the divine assembly.

- The gods accept with the acclamation “Marduk is king!” (Enuma Elish IV 28) and equip him with a sceptre, royal robe, throne and magical weapons. In the contest that follows, Tiamat is defeated and killed, and out of her body are created the sky, the stars, constellations, sun and moon, the earth and the waters surrounding the earth.



- The human being, a lowly creature (lullu), is created by the god Ea out of the blood of the slaughtered Kingu, mixed with slime. To humanity is assigned the task of relieving the secondary gods of the duty of serving the high gods. In gratitude, the gods erect the esagila sanctuary for Marduk, Enlil, and Ea. A banquet follows, and the destinies are fixed. The poem ends with the recital of a litany of the fifty names of Marduk and the praise of his incomparable greatness: “none among the gods can equal him” (Enuma Elish VII 14).



**AN EXPRESSION OF
ULTIMATE RELIGIOUS REALITIES
GLIMPSED
BUT UNABLE TO BE EXPRESSED
EXCEPT IN THE VEILED LANGUAGE OF
SYMBOL, STORY, SONG, DANCE, RITUAL**

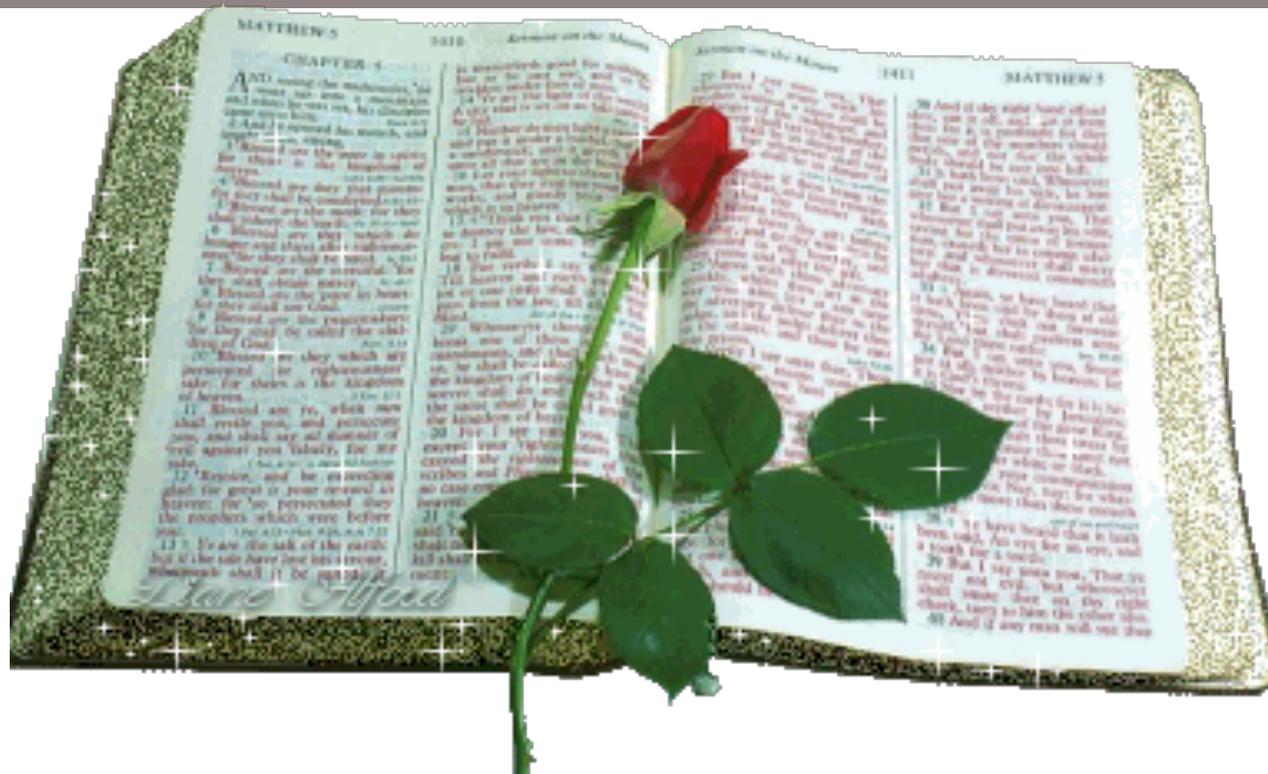
- Scholars discern two different kinds of material in Genesis I-II, recognisable by their different styles, interests and themes.
- We have an account of creation culminating in the blessing of the seventh day, a story of the Flood, and a number of genealogies. These have the distinctive style of the Priestly School (P).
- There is also a story of the beginnings of the human race, which looks at the human condition in the light of Israel's faith, and includes the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the Flood and the Tower of Babel.

- The authors of Genesis have blended this material into one continuous narrative. Both strands are composed as counters to the primeval myths encountered in Babylon during the exile, and they declare that the God of Israel, YHWH, is the Creator of the universe and the Lord of history
- Genesis presents an alternative view of creation, of the origins of mankind, and of the presence and action of God in the world – a view that is inspired by the distinctive faith of Israel in YHWH and in the special relationship of God with Israel.

- These chapters are not history as we understand history, for they do not narrate historical events. At the same time they are not myth, for myth sets out to describe a stable and unchanging situation, usually supported by cult, and one that favours the power exercised by the ruler who is presented as 'divine'. The material we are about to study has a different focus. It is on God as creator, on God's relationship with creation, and especially with the human race, and on how people must live to benefit from God's blessing.

- The text expresses inspired insights into God's design for creation and into why it is that God's design is sometimes thwarted by human sin. The kind of sin that is highlighted comes from reflection on the kind of sin that brought about the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile. The post-exilic authors wanted their contemporaries to learn the right lessons, so as not to repeat the sin of their ancestors.

CREATION STORIES IN SCRIPTURE



Genesis 1:1 - 2:4 – A Liturgical Hymn (P)

- The text is composed for a community who thought that the world inhabited by human beings was at the centre of the cosmos. They imagined the sky as a solid vault. They knew that the world comprised land and sea, but they thought it was surrounded on all sides by the swirling waters of the primeval ocean. Rain occurred when God arranged for the sluice gates of heaven to be opened and some of the ocean above the sky to be poured out on the sea and land. This is how they imagined the world, and it is these people whose inspired reflections we are about to read.



- Having lost their temple and so the temple cult, their focus was now on the community assembled in prayer. The Sabbath takes on a special importance.
- The authors of Genesis 1:1 - 2:4 have God create simply through his word. In this way they carefully preserve the transcendence of God who creates by the power of his will. His word is enough. He speaks and it is done.

- The priestly editors wish to focus on the power of God, on the basic goodness, indeed sacredness, of creation, and on God's word that, as promise, is the driving force of history.
- While their focus is not scientific but religious, the authors are men of their time. This is the era of Pythagoras (582-500BC) and Heraclitus (flourished c.500BC). The poem we are about to study shows signs of their being in touch with contemporary scientific interest.

- They think of humanity as living in community with responsibilities from God for carrying on the work of creation, caring intelligently for the universe created by God for mankind.
- As priests their interest is primarily in cult and in praise of God.
- The poem is an exultant hymn of praise for the wonder of creation.

Ways of imagining creation in the Ancient Near East texts

- I. Generation from the gods (see the *Enuma Elish*) - not found in the writings of Israel

2. Cosmic Struggle between God and the forces of chaos

‘Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of YHWH; awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old. Was it not you who cut Rahab to pieces, who pierced that monster through?’ (Isaiah 51:9).

¹³You divided the sea by your might.

You broke the heads of the dragons in the sea.

¹⁴You crushed the heads of Leviathan;

you gave him as food

for the creatures of the wilderness’ (Psalm 74:13-14).

3. God works like a potter working clay

- ‘YHWH God shaped humanity [*’adam*] from the dust of the soil [*’adamah*] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the human being became a living being’ (Genesis 2:7).
- ‘YHWH, you are our Maker. We are the clay, you are the potter. We are all the work of your hand’ (Isaiah 64:8).
- ‘Remember that you moulded me like clay. Will you turn be back to dust’ (Job 10:9).

Genesis 1:1 - Acclamation of praise of the Creator

‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.’

בָּרָא

[‘cut’, ‘separate out’]

Only found with God as subject

Psalm 33:6

‘By GOD’s word the heavens were made,
and by God’s breath all their starry host.

Genesis 1:2 The setting for creation

‘The earth was without form, an empty wasteland [תֵהוֹ וְבֵהוֹ] and darkness was over the face of the primeval deep’.

Prior to creation there is no life, no orientation, no distinctions, no forms, no space, no time; only general darkness and the chaos of undifferentiated waters.

‘From generation to generation it will lie desolate [תֵהוֹ]; no one will ever pass through it again ... God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and the plumb line of desolation [בֵהוֹ]’ (Isaiah 34:10-11).

- ‘I looked at the earth, and it was without form and empty [תִּהְיֶה וְבָהוּ]; and at the heavens, and their light was gone. I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying. I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away. I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert’ (Jeremiah 4:23-26).

- ‘God’s breath swept over the surface of the waters.’
- ‘In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions’ (Deuteronomy 32:10-11).

Genesis 1:3-19 : From Chaos to Cosmos.

- The aim of the account is not to surprise, but to create a sense of peace from the underlying stability of things from the transcendent, divine view.

1. Genesis 1:3-5 Scene 1

In the opening hymn in Genesis, God creates simply by his word

- God said: 'Let light be', and light was.



c.14 billion years ago

- And God saw the light that it was good, and God separated between the light and the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And it was evening and it was morning - day one.





Gustave Doré 1832-1883
a world-famous illustrator.

2. Genesis 1:6-8 Scene 2

- God said: 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, to be a separation between waters and waters'. And God made the dome that separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And it was evening and it was morning - a second day.

3. Genesis 1:9-19 Scene 3

9-10

- God said: 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place and let the dry land appear'. And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. **And God saw that it was good.**



Genesis 1:10-13

- And God said: 'Let the earth sprout forth fresh sprouts: plants which produce seed, and fruit trees that bear fruit , each of its kind containing its own seed, on the earth'. And it was so. And the earth brought forth fresh sprouts: plants which produce seed, each of its kind, and fruit trees that bear fruit containing its own seed, each of its kind. **And God saw that it was good.** and it was evening and it was morning - a third day.



Genesis 1:14-19

- And God said: 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate between the day and the night, to be signs for the seasons, for the days and years; and to be lights in the dome of the sky to give light on the earth'. And it was so.



c. 5 billion years ago



Genesis 1:14-19

- And God made the two great lights: the great light to rule over the day, and the small light to rule over the night, and the stars. And God set them in the dome of the sky to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and the night, and to separate between the light and the darkness. **And God saw that it was good.** And it was evening and it was morning – a fourth day.
- Read Job 38:1-38

- God's action on the fourth day sees chaos overcome by divine power, and our beautiful cosmos established. God's creative action is celebrated in a spirit of wonder and praise. God has spoken. Creation is good and God can be trusted to continue to care for the creation he has made.

- ‘Those who live at earth’s farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy. You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain. You water its furrows, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout for joy. Yes, they sing’ (Psalm 65:8-13).