

97-08-02b

Okay, we're back. Now to begin in Genesis chapter 1, verse 1. Most of us know this verse by heart, even without having made any attempt to memorize it. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

As mentioned earlier, the first words of this verse are Bar Rashid. The next word is Barah, which is the third masculine singular verb for create. The verb Barah is unique in Hebrew in that the only subject that's ever associated with that verb is God.

It does never say that any man Barah'd anything. When the Hebrew verb Barah is used, God is always the subject. The more common word for making or manufacturing or creating something is Asah.

Barah, B-A-R-A, is the word used in Genesis 1. It has picked up a lot of baggage in its travels through history. A lot of times you'll hear it said that this means to create something out of nothing. That's a little bit of an inference because obviously since it is used in reference to God and his work, we don't have anything to compare it to.

We can't say, well, someone created a poem or someone created... We don't have any analogies to say, well, see, here's where we can demonstrate that this is creating something from nothing. It is intrinsic in the account that before the beginning there was nothing, and God spoke and things came into being. But I say all of that to say you cannot prove linguistically that Barah means to create out of nothing.

That's more of an inference or an understanding of the nature of God's creative act, especially here in Genesis 1. But there's no need to die for that on the basis of the word Barah. Suffice it to say that Barah is a word that means to create, and the subject of this verb in Hebrew scripture is always God. In the beginning, Barashit, God created.

Barah ha Elohim. And right away your source critics would say, well, here we have the Elohist portion of the account. Now, we won't need to worry about that.

Barashit, Barah ha Elohim, ha shamayim va'et ha'erec. Sometimes I can just go through and read in Hebrew just to listen to the sounds of the words. I think it's such a beautiful language.

We're probably butchering badly as Americans trying to speak it. But the words are beautiful to look at. They're beautiful to study.

Each word in Hebrew is like a snapshot. It's a very terse language. There can be a sentence in Hebrew that might have four or five words, and it might take 12 or 15 words in English to express the meaning of that phrase or that sentence.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Right away, as we look at

Genesis and begin this account, we have questions. Well, is this the earliest beginning? Is this the original beginning before which there was nothing? Obviously, God is eternal, and God existed before this beginning.

From other passages, we realize that the angels existed before this beginning because it says that the angels sang together at the point that God laid the foundations of the world and so forth. So what type of beginning are we talking about? This is not the beginning of everything because God is eternal and preexists. Some of his creation in terms of angels are not included in this account, and they predate this.

But this is the beginning for us. This is the beginning for the audience to whom this communication is addressed. This is the beginning of the material universe.

Some students of the Word of God see this as a title, that this verse actually serves as the title of the book, that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and then the remaining verses here in Chapter 1 go on to detail how God created the heavens and the earth. There are others who believe that this verse comprehends everything that God did, so that when it says God created the heavens and the earth, that is the entire creation. I recently read a book by John Salehammer.

He's done a lot of work in Genesis, and he believes that latter idea, that Genesis 1.1 comprehends the creation of the heavens, the earth, the water, the animals, the plants, man, everything that you find referenced in Genesis, everything that you see around us, all of that is summed up in Genesis 1.1. His particular view is somewhat unique in the verses that follow, and I'll fill you in on that a little bit later. But right away, in Genesis 1.1, this book, this communication from God, establishes a precedent. If you go back to the ancient Near East, and the cultural milieu in which Moses and the Israelites, in which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived, that millennium from 2000 to 1000 BC, wherever you want to date the book, wherever you figure, we believe that the exodus took place in roughly 1440 BC, and that sometime within a few years, one side or the other of that is when Moses recorded these words that we now study.

But in the cultures that existed in those days, there were many explanations for how things had come to be. As we mentioned in the first session, it's a natural human instinct to want to establish a context for one's own existence, for your national existence. Why is it that we teach U.S. history to our kids? We want them to know why they're patriotic, what our country stands for, where it came from, how it was founded.

If we're believers, we focus on the importance of Christianity in the founding of our country, something that has been suppressed and eliminated from a lot of our history books, unfortunately. But it was largely a spiritual issue that was involved in the creation and formation of this country. There were a lot of believers involved in it.

And so these cultures that surrounded and existed back in those days, ancient days, had

these same questions and provided themselves with answers. If you think about the time of origin of Adam and Eve, if you stick literally to the chronology that we have in Genesis, the genealogies, how long a patriarch would live before he had his son and so forth and work backward, somewhere in the vicinity of 3500 B.C. to 4000 B.C. you have the exit from the garden. We don't have any idea how long Adam and Eve remained in the garden.

But tracing back, and we'll see this when we get into our first Eletonadot passage, which is Hebrew for these are the generations of, we'll note some of these chronologies. But Abraham living circa 1800 B.C., Moses circa 1400 B.C., give or take. There are some more chronological issues we'll cover eventually in that regard.

But suffice it to say that they stand roughly halfway between the days of Adam and Eve and creation and the time of David or the time of Christ. And as populations spread, you have this account in Genesis of the origins of many of the nations and where they went to on the planet's surface and so forth. There's going to be a recollection.

There's going to be fathers telling sons about the days of the flood, about how creation came into being. And with many of these being pagan cultures who cared nothing about God, these became embellished and were added to and enhanced and changed around. And you have the origin of cultural myth, the mythologies that tried to provide an explanation when people had these kinds of questions.

In the days when Genesis appeared on the bookstands back in 1400 B.C., there were many such explanations, and a lot of them had elements of the truth. Archaeologists have uncovered ancient accounts of the flood. Scholars of the flood and people interested in that have gone around even in today's age and have found that virtually, I have heard it said in more than one place, that virtually every culture has a flood story somewhere in its past.

The Chinese have a flood story. The Mesopotamians had a flood story. The Sumerians had a flood story.

The African cultures have flood stories. South American cultures, African cultures, Asiatic cultures, Indian cultures. Everywhere you go, someone has some twisted version of the flood.

The earlier you go in history, the more similarities you find, and that kind of stands to reason. When you get back closer to the days when the flood actually took place, the memory is going to be better. It's going to be less likely to make up a wild tale when there are people who have heard from their ancestors what happened in the flood.

Well, in these days, in Mesopotamia, Mesopotamia is up there north and a little bit east of Palestine, what we would call the Holy Land, Jerusalem, Israel. Ur of the Chaldees is up

in that region, and when Abraham left Ur, he was leaving one of the cultural and socioeconomic capitals of Mesopotamia. We have uncovered in our day ancient Mesopotamian libraries, clay tablets written in cuneiform with all kinds of records.

They found an entire library of these things. Some dating to the 18th century B.C., right around Abraham's time at Mari. There's another library at Nuzi that dates to around 15th century B.C. There's this insight into the way people thought and communicated.

They have found names in these records, contracts and marriage agreements and so forth. A lot of people try to say, oh, this is all the Genesis account and so forth, this is all Hebrew mythology that was written very late, but that became hard to sustain when they discovered these libraries and found names like Haran and Tira and Abraham in these 18th century B.C. records. The names that we find in the early chapters of Genesis are consistent with what archaeology has uncovered in the Mesopotamian region.

Not only that, but there are creation accounts and there are flood accounts included in these ancient libraries. But in all of these accounts, there are similarities and there are also great differences. There are three major flood accounts that we find intriguing because of their affinities with the accounts we have in Genesis.

One is called Enuma Elish, which is a story of a man who finds himself caught up in activities by the gods and is preserved through a great flood on an ark on which he takes animals and he emerges and offers sacrifice afterward. You have many parallels to the Noah story. The Sumerian flood account has similar details and there is a third account that I can't even pronounce.

It starts with an A and has four or five syllables. It is also an ancient Mesopotamian creation and flood story. It deals with the hero's name is Adapa, Agapa.

Which is similar to Adam. It's got the same initial letters as Adam. There are some striking similarities that we find in the creation and in the flood stories.

There are also customs that are similar that prevailed in those days. There are records in ancient Mesopotamia of a husband doing a sort of an adoption to where his wife becomes his sister, which reminds us of Abraham and Sarah and their relationship. There are accounts where a nephew becomes a man's heir when he has no offspring of his own, and it reminds us of Abraham and Lot.

There are accounts of slaves becoming surrogate wives to produce offspring for a barren wife, like you have with Hagar. On and on, there are dozens of these, and we'll note some of them as we go through Genesis. But all of these verify the antiquity and the originality of the account, if we needed that verification, which we really don't, because we trust what Scripture says about itself.

But it has certainly put a cork in the bottle of a lot of secular scholarship that has tried to

late-date and diminish the authority and antiquity of the scriptural account. Archaeology has caused big problems for a lot of these guys who would like to explain away the accounts of Genesis. But here's the thing.

In addition to the similarities, there are also great differences, and it reminds us of the difference between Christianity and other religions today. There are religions that believe in one God, like Islam, and yet you can find some moral parallels in the Koran and in the Bible and so forth. Muslims believe in Abraham, and Islam claims Abraham as their father and patriarch, and you have a similarity there.

But beneath the surface of those similarities, there are some great fundamental differences. What's the fundamental difference between Christianity and every other religion and cult in the world, past or present? Christianity is the only system of faith that acknowledges man's total inability to improve himself or help himself. Christianity, biblical truth, shows man's depravity, man's inadequacy, man's hopelessness, helplessness, and uselessness, and shows God as the actor, as the redeemer, as the savior.

It is his grace and his compassion that brings about renewal and restoration, salvation, and ameliorating and eradicating the effects of the fall. Man is presented in a very uncomplimentary way in biblical truth, which is accurate. All of the other religions in the world, both past and present, give man some sort of way to redeem himself, to prove himself, to improve himself, to rise from whatever level he occupies to become a deity or to become a god or to join the collective consciousness or whatever it might be.

But it's always man by man's efforts improving himself. This is one of the great evils of the legalism that Paul writes against in Galatians and in Romans, that God condemns Israel for in the Old Testament and in the New, that when this sort of thinking creeps into Christianity or into belief in God, we sacrifice the truth and the uniqueness of God's communication to us and start to buy into this false idea that we can somehow do something to please God, to better ourselves and so forth. It flies in the face of the first and greatest truth that everything we have comes from God.

That's what Genesis emphasizes and focuses on. And it is the distinctive. There is no other religion that depicts man in his depravity, in his weakness and helplessness.

Even science, which is a religion, it just doesn't call itself that, it's a system of faith, it's a system of explanation of origins and of operation, believes in the inherent goodness of man. We're only evil because our environment has made us so. If we can improve the environment, if we can eliminate the factors that move us toward bad, why, we will turn out good.

And it denies depravity. It denies inherent corruption and degeneracy with which we are born. And every other religion has some system of merit.

It is the truth of God that demonstrates our insufficiency and our complete lack of merit. And it is that truth that distinguishes and characterizes this. Well, that same type of distinction was true back when God first began to set down his truth in writing through Moses.

In the days of Mesopotamia and the ancient cultures in the ancient Near East, their myths and their legends and their explanations for where things came from and how things work were just like the religions of today. And they did not accurately, even though they had some of the same elements, there was a flood, there was a creation and so forth, but creation was a result of the caprice of the gods. In the ancient Mesopotamian myths, the creation of man was sort of an afterthought.

The gods were eating and drinking and making merry up there and they suddenly started running low on food. And they said, you know, we're having a great time here, but we don't want to have to stop the party to get more food and get more drink. Let's create a serving creature who will do this for us.

And so as sort of an idea to help the party go along, well, they created man. And man was to serve food to the gods. There is no recognition of the problem with man in these.

In fact, there is a legend, one of these ancient Mesopotamian myths about this Adapa that I mentioned earlier, where there are many gods and his personal god wants him. He has been invited to go up to the pantheon of the gods. It's very interesting.

He's been invited to come up and to be given a gift of bread and water, bread of life and water of life. But his personal god warns him that he should not go. And he obeys his personal god.

He does not go and partake of this bread of life and water of life. And he's depicted as doing well because of this. So man, in his obedience and in his merit, avoids the bread of life and water of life, when in reality it's just the opposite.

It's our depravity. It's our failure to accept the bread of life that is the problem. And you can see that there is probably some conscious activity behind the perversion of truth that has taken place in these cultures who do not accept God and don't pursue God.

Their truth is mingled with error and that leavening leavens the whole lump. So when Genesis appeared, it stood in great contrast. Instead of man being an afterthought and the gods being capricious and fallible, a lot of times things that came into being, like nature and plants and animal life and even man himself, were depicted as being the result of procreation among the gods.

Two gods would get together and have a good time and out of that would come a goddess or another god and that would somehow result in nature. And they were seen to be the same. Nature is a god and this god is nature, therefore you can worship nature

and you're worshipping God.

I lift up my eyes unto the hills, whence cometh my strength. Well, when a Hebrew quoted that passage of scripture, when he lifts up his eyes to the hills, what's he thinking about? He's thinking about God who has his chariots and his armies in the hills ready to swoop down and help. When an ancient Mesopotamian thought that, he figured the hills are God, that it's all one.

And there was no system or plan. It was the caprice of the gods, the folly of the gods, who weren't perfect, who made mistakes, and out of their mistakes some demi-god would be born. And this is why we have trouble on earth.

It's because the gods messed up. And creation often times was seen to be a result of the errors of the gods, instead of having one god who is perfect and has a conscious plan and a reason for creating man. And man is at the center of his creation.

We'll see as we go through the creation account here at the beginning of Genesis that God has created the heavens and the earth and he molds and shapes the earth and he plants the garden in Eden, culminating in the creation of man and providing a place for man. And we are the focus of attention in this creation, rather than an afterthought. Genesis was unique.

This account and this belief is unique in the ancient world. Nobody else, even though they had some of the elements of the truth, because it had been handed down through the generations, no one had that understanding of who God was and what God's purpose was, the way that Israel did. And why is it that Israel had that truth? Because Israel, they are the people of promise.

They are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And we will see the choice of God in separating Israel out from among the nations to be his peculiar people in this book as well. But Genesis stands out in the very first verse, in the beginning God created, distinguishes this account from all others that existed at the time.

Nobody else thought that there was a personal, individual, all-powerful God who consciously and on purpose created the heavens and the earth. Now it says, we've talked about the fact that this is sometimes seen as a title for the book or as a summary that is then detailed in the succeeding verses. Verse 2 says, After God created the heavens and the earth, you have verse 2, the earth was without form and void and darkness was on the face of the deep and the Spirit of God was huddling over the face of the waters.

The tension or the perceived contrast between verse 1 and verse 2 has also been the occasion for endless debate, discussion, writing. There is a battleship full of literature on Genesis 1.1 and its relationship to 1.2. It is difficult for many to believe that God would

create something that is *tohu wa bohu*, which is what without form and void represents in the Hebrew text. Would God create the earth without form and void? People say, no, whatever comes from the hand of God is perfect, it's not void, it's not without form, therefore something must have happened between Genesis 1.1 and 1.2. Now this idea, which has been variously called the gap theory, whatever, was unknown until the last few hundred years, once science got cranked up, once the Enlightenment started looking around and archaeologists started looking around and finding dinosaur bones and ascertaining that the earth appeared to be much older than what the biblical account allowed for.

In an effort to maintain belief in the literal account that we find here in Genesis 1.1 and 2 and accept the findings of science, we had to find room for the dinosaurs, we had to find room for the geological layers of sediment in the earth's crust and the antiquity, the obvious antiquity of the earth. And so this idea came into being as a result of that problem. Science says the earth is billions of years old.

The Bible says it's a few thousand years old. How do we account for that? Where are we going to put the dinosaurs and the Grand Canyon that has been cut out over the millennia? And so they say, well, here's a convenient place. The reason they can do that is that the first word in Genesis 1.2 is the Hebrew conjunction *w*. A German would say *w*. It's just the single letter *w*. It's the word *and*.

It's also variously translated now, but, and then. It serves a multiplicity of functions and it can be translated adversatively by saying *but*, consecutively by saying *and*, starting a first section by saying *now*. Those are some of the most common translations.

But you can see in it a continuation of something earlier or you can see that it's beginning a new section. So people say, well, this particular *w* is starting a new section. So between 1.1 and 1.2, there's this indeterminate amount of time.

And in that time, we can have had the perfect creation of 1.1. Something goes wrong with it. And by the time you get to 1.2, after some indeterminate period of time, it is now without form and void. Something bad happens so that it is shrouded in darkness and chaos.

And this allows for the dinosaurs. There was a first creation that went awry somehow and God packed it in ice. God demolished it somehow.

But we have to be careful of deriving our interpretation of scripture based on the need to solve a problem. And it is a little bit suspicious that no one saw this or felt the need to see it until science began stating that the age of the earth was so old. And we will see in the course of our studies of this book that there is no need to artificially introduce a gap here between these verses.

And it is artificial and it is induced. And most linguists who know Hebrew well will say that this is not an adversative conjunction. It doesn't begin a new section.

There is no reason to assume a gap there. And that's the reason no one saw it there for 2,000 years of scholarship. None of the ancient rabbis saw it there.

None of the early church fathers saw it there. It wasn't until just the last few hundred years that people felt the need to try to wedge some time into history to account for dinosaurs and geology. With that in mind, why is it that verse 2 says the earth is without form and void and darkness is on the face of the deep? I believe, and there are as many opinions about this as you have commentators and interpreters, but using the same approach of interpretation that we have used in all the scriptures we've gone to, if we take what the Word of God says at face value, it says in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

And the earth was without form. So we are, at this point, watching God in the act of finishing this creation. It's not an instantaneous creation in which everything is finished in a point of time.

God no doubt could have done that. God chose to stretch creation over six days. And we are now watching the progress of day one.

As you know, the evening and the morning mark successive days in this creation account. And it talks about what God did and it gives us the sequence and it shows us that he did things in stages. And he did things via a process.

Now another way that people have tried to reconcile science and the biblical account is to say, well, each of these days is indeed a process and it is a process that took untold numbers of years. A day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day. They'll quote Peter and say, now see, these could have been eons and ages of geological time involved in each of these days.

Once again, nobody read the scripture that way until recently. The Hebrew word for day here is yom. Occasionally that word is used to refer to a period of time that's characterized by something, the day of the Lord.

In that day, I will restore Israel. In that day, your children will do this, that and the other. In that day, and it can refer to the millennial kingdom and so forth.

But those passages don't say there will be an evening and there will be a morning. Evening and morning, I don't see how the statement could be any clearer that these are 24-hour days. These are all of the statements that refer to this in the law.

When God says, six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work and the seventh will be the Sabbath day of rest. For in six days God created the heavens and the earth. God makes

a direct comparison.

He says, I did my work in six days and rested on the seventh. You do your work in six days and rest on the seventh. We also have some problems with that just logically.

I'll anticipate a little bit when we get to these other days of creation. But you may recall that it is not until the fourth day that God puts lights up in the heavens. In Genesis 1.14, let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night and let them be for signs and seasons and days and years.

That happens on day four of creation. Well, if you're going to say that each of these days is a geological age or some great millennial length of time, do you really want to try to defend the idea that in verse 11, the earth brought forth grass, herbs, fruit trees according to their kind and had seeds and so on for thousands and thousands and perhaps millions of years before there were any lights up in the sky, which happens on the fourth day. It just doesn't hold together.

This is an effort, an attempt to try to solve a perceived problem between what science says and what the Bible says. And it just falls on its face. You can't shoehorn in geological epochs into these 24-hour creation days.

It just does not work. And when we look at these in detail, we'll see that. What we do see here, and to conclude our introduction this morning to Genesis, is that we see God when he comes in contact with something that is chaotic.

When God is present and there is a problem, something is without form and void, the presence of God makes a difference. That's why you have the first reference to the Spirit of God in verse 2. God is in the act of creating the earth, and it's a process that takes him a day. And in that process, he is present.

The Spirit of God hovers, moves over the face of the deep, the face of the waters. These chaotic waters cover the earth. We're going to see some fascinating things about the waters next Sunday.

But the important thing is right at the beginning of the Bible, right at the beginning of Genesis, the thing that distinguishes the truth, the truth of God, and the truth of God's nature and God's plan, is that it is his presence that makes all the difference. There is chaos, there is lack of form, lack of substance, lack of organization at this point in God's creation. But his presence is going to change all that.

This is the greatest chaos that has ever been. It is the greatest state of disorganization that the universe has ever seen, is in these first few minutes of creation. What solves that? It's the personal presence of God.

Specifically, the Spirit of God. That's what's going to change this chaos into order. That's

what's going to bring light into the darkness.

That's what's going to convert something that is hopeless and useless into something that's going to reflect the glory of God. And that's the great presence that we have in our soul. Do we have chaos? Do we have disorganization? Do we have things that still need to be formed? What's the answer? It's the same answer that got the universe rolling.

It's the presence, the personal presence of God. Specifically, the person of his Spirit. What a tremendous gift God has given us in this life to have the same Spirit.

This very Spirit in Genesis 1-2 that huddled over the face of the waters is in our soul. What happens to chaos and disorganization in the presence of God? It gets resolved. It's connection with God, fellowship and communion with God that overcomes chaos, that overcomes that which is not productive, that which is not formed and organized and useful.

God is the vital living force that converts what is useless into what is useful. God starts with the disorganized and organizes it. Even science has observed in the second law of thermodynamics that left to itself, every system, every organized view of matter that you might want to look at goes from a greater to a lesser state of organization.

The simple way of putting it is everything that's put together falls apart. That's the trend of the universe. Left to itself, anything will corrupt and degenerate.

The presence of God reverses that trend. It's supernatural. It's divine.

It's the reverse of the second law of thermodynamics. When God is present, that which is futile and disorganized becomes organized. You can see it in the principle of life.

Why does metal grow on bread? Because you can't stop life. God told life to reproduce and it happens. It's his spoken word that makes things grow where you wouldn't think anything could grow.

You look in the city and you see grass growing out of the side of a building because you just can't squelch the divine life that God has decreed for this planet. You can't keep it from happening. It is that energy that's in our soul in the person of the Holy Spirit.

It's a tremendous privilege to be the dwelling place for God the Holy Spirit. We're going to see what God the Holy Spirit does in this chaotic situation when we resume our study of Genesis next time. This will serve as our introduction, brief, but it sets the stage for what God wants to communicate to us in the record of his activities in creation, which takes up perhaps the first two or three chapters here, and then the account of God's people and his interaction with those people and his promises to those people, which take up the next 46 or 47 chapters of the book.

Let's close here in prayer. Father, we thank you for our place in your plan. We thank you that you have provided us through your word a context in which to view ourselves, to see our place in creation, our place in your purpose, our place in terms of relationship with you.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit, who we have seen in Genesis 1 and 2 and who resides within us, will make these truths live within us and that the principle of divine life that he represents will be active within us and that we will bear fruit and we will be motivated to pursue and fulfill the calling that you have for us in this life. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.