

Genesis a Different Approach Creation Part 1

By

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A considerable while back I began a writing on Genesis that I put aside for personal reasons and the business of life. The fall season seems to be a better and calmer time for me to write and reflect so I have picked up this task once more to share my thoughts on this very interesting book. Most scholars consider it to be the book of origins. The origin of mankind, the origin of Israel and the origin of a unique relationship between God and a particular people. In my introductory writing I said the following:

“If there is one book of the Bible that almost every Christian on the planet has read, it is Genesis. It was also one of the core studies for me when I was pursuing my Doctorate in Biblical studies. In fact several teachers I have had over the years have all said the same thing; all we ever need to know about God and His relationship to man and His creation are contained in the first few chapters of Genesis. In some ways that makes a lot of sense since the opening chapters of the Bible has caused controversy and turmoil in the Christian community for years. We look at Genesis with a western/ Greek worldview which tries to make the book a scientific treatise on how the world began. We attach 21st century thinking to a book that was written for a culture and people that do not share the same world view as we do. As a result we have imposed on the written pages our set of values conditions and theology that was never intended in the first place.” While I do not want to simply repeat what I wrote before I did want us to have a common ground on which we approach this text.

I use extensively the JPS Torah Commentary by Nahum M Sarna as a jumping off point for the book. The Hebrew name for this book is “Bereshit” the first word of the book itself. Rabbinic sources expand this name to “Sefer Bereshit” (The book of Bereshit) This was a common practice of ancient Near Eastern scholars to name a book by the first word of the book. The name Genesis is derived from the Latin Vulgate which in turn goes back to the old Latin (pre 4th century) to the Greek Bible the Septuagint. According to Sarna, “ a famous manuscript copy, the mid-fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus now in a British museum, features the title Genesis Kosmou. (The origin of the universe) The shorter more common title may be traced to the Greek rendering of the initial clause of Genesis 2:4 **This is the book of the genesis of heaven and earth.**

All present-day editions of Genesis divide the book into 50 chapters, however this practice does not have its roots in Jewish tradition. This division was the result of early Christian Jewish debates which focused on the interpretation of specific passages, which necessitated a common standardized system of reference. These chapter divisions replaced the earlier (pre 1330) Jewish system based on weekly Torah readings. As we have the book today it is divided into three main subject units. According to Sarna, these units are presented chronologically and consist of; a description of creation (Gen 1:1-2:3) the emergence, development and degeneration of the human race (Gen 2:4-11:26) and the account of the lives of the founding fathers of the people of Israel (Gen 11:27-50:26). The book covers a span of 2309 years as computed from the data in the narratives and the genealogies of the Hebrew text. It offers a glimpse of 1948 years of human history from Adam to Abraham to the death of Joseph. As Sarna says “ 80 percent of the contents of Genesis is devoted to about 17 percent of the time span that is covered.” He goes on to state that “the imbalance is there by design. The theme of Creation, important as it is, serves merely as an introduction to the book’s central motif.: God’s role in history.

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The story of creation that opens the Book of Genesis is different from all of the other cosmologies that existed at the time. All other cosmologies centered on what happened in the celestial realms, the fighting of the gods for domination as I outlined in the first section of this commentary. The cosmology of Genesis centers its emphasis on what happens beneath the celestial realm. Again as Sarna states so well, “The Biblical creation narrative is a document of Faith. It is a quest for meaning and a statement of a religious position. It enunciates the fundamental postulates of the religion of Israel, the central ideas and concepts that animate the whole of Biblical literature. Its quintessential teaching is that the universe is wholly the purposeful product of divine intelligence, that is, of the one self-sufficient, self-existing God, who is a transcendent Being outside of nature and who is sovereign over space and time.”

Next time we begin with Genesis 1:1 “When God began to create” A thought to ponder since that translation is direct from the Hebrew what does that simple statement mean to you. Does it change how you view creation? What thoughts does it conjure in your mind?