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**GENESIS**

The importance of the Old Testament book of Genesis in the history of science stems largely from the fact that the narrative begins with an account of creation. A wide variety of theological cosmologies were based on differing interpretations of these few verses. Most of these views hinged on two major issues of interpretation: the nature of the "beginning" and the primordial materials described in Genesis 1:1–2; and the six "days" described in Genesis 1:4–2:3.

Interpretations of Genesis 1: 1–2 varied with the version of the Bible that was used. The Hebrew version begins with a relative clause: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void . . . ." (New Revised Standard Version), much like the parallel Hebrew construction in Genesis 2:4. So the Hebrew version of Genesis began with the primordial materials of formless earth, water, and darkness (Genesis 1:2). Various interpretations of this "beginning" were possible. Some rabbis accepted the inference that God began with a pre-existent chaos and then created an ordered cosmos (Genesis Rabbah 1:5). Others brought in texts like Proverbs 8:22–24 to demonstrate that God had created the water and the darkness and that the "beginning" of Genesis 1:1 was God's own wisdom as encoded in the Torah ( Jubilees 2:2–3; Genesis Rabbah 1:1, 9). Still others argued that God must have created worlds before this one (Genesis Rabbah 3:7; 9:2).

Most Diaspora Jews and early Christians, however, used the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the *Septuagint.* This text begins with the absolute statement: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," which implied an absolute beginning for this universe. It also implied that the unformed earth and water were included in the initial act of creation. This reading was followed by pioneering theologians like Basil of Caesarea (c. 329–379) and Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and became the standard interpretation for Christians.

The meaning of the six days of Genesis 1 was also debated. Some exegetes thought there was a temporal sequence of days without specifying their exact length ( Jubilees 2:2; Genesis Rabbah 1:3). For those who accepted the idea of an absolute beginning, this implied that God created the cosmos in two stages: God made the building materials (unformed earth, water, etc.) at the beginning of the first day; then God illuminated and formed those materials as described in the narrative (Wisdom of Solomon 11:17; 4 Ezra 6:38–40; Justin Martyr).

Others exegetes saw inconsistencies in the idea of a temporal sequence of days. For example, the first "day" that is described is assigned a cardinal number ("one day" rather than "first day," Genesis 1:5) in both the Hebrew and Greek versions (Genesis Rabbah 2:3; 3:9; Basil); the sun, moon, and stars appear in the narrative three days after the first evening and morning. Some Rabbis saw a nontemporal parallelism between the first three and the second three days (Genesis Rabbah 12:5). Others suggested that the ten utterances ("God said") of the narrative were patterned after the Ten Commandments or the construction of the Tabernacle (Pirqei Avot 5:1; Midrash Tanhuma). Other scholars argued that divine creation required no effort (Genesis Rabbah 12:10) and that it all might have taken place in a single instant (Philo; Midrash Tanhuma). This idea of a simultaneous creation of all things was followed by early Christian theologians like Origen (c. 185–254), Athanasius (c. 293–373), Basil, and Augustine.

*See also* ***COSMOLOGY, RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS***; ***CREATIO EX NIHILO***; ***LIFE, ORIGINS OF***

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