

In the Beginning God!

The Bible opens with a declaration that sets the stage for everything that follows:

“In the beginning God”

This stands in stark contrast with *Enuma Elish* which began with two bodies of water, *Apsu* and *Tiamat*. They were the father and mother of the first two Babylonian gods. The birth of the gods implies the existence of some primordial, self-contained, realm from which the gods themselves derive. There is no notion of the birth of God in Genesis -- and no biography of God -- *the existence of God is self-evident!*

The Hebrew concept of God is implicit in the narrative, not formulated abstractly and explicitly. This is highlighted by the absence of a name. *There is no allusion to the people of Israel, Jerusalem, the Temple – or any other people, place or religion.* No name is given for this God. No one group can claim him. His identity is completely wrapped up in what he does!

“ . . . God created”

This God “creates” things. The Hebrew word translated “create” revealed something very important – *it means “to change things that exist.”*

- *What existed, along with God, before the process of creating began?*
- *What did God change to create the heavens and the earth?*

Before the text reveals the answers to those questions, it makes one point very clear:

“The earth did not exist.”

Then it reveals what did exist before the creation process began:

*“Darkness was on the surface of Deep.
The ruach of God hovered over the surface of the water.”*

Being aware of the locations of those things is very important:

- *The ruach of God is above the surface of water (Deep).*
- *Darkness is on the surface of the deep water.*
- *The deep water is beneath darkness.*

Above we learned that God creates and to that information we can now add the Hebrew word “ruach.” What does “*ruach of God*” mean? The options for translating “*ruach*” are

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“*wind, breath, spirit, presence and life.*” Unlike English, Hebrew thinkers are not forced to pick one meaning. They must view a word in the context in which it appears and often combine options available for the word to create a “*contextual meaning.*”

*In this context “ruach” signifies the presence of God,
in whom the breath of life exists.*

There was no life in the dark and deep water beneath God, as he hovered above them. Interestingly, the Hebrew text includes a word that links this account to *Enuma Elish*. The Hebrew word “*tehom*” is translated “deep” above. “Linguistically, it corresponds to the Akkadian word *Tiamat*, the name of the body of saltwater in *Enuma Elish*.”

*The existence of water before the process of creation began
is taken for granted here.*

We now know that God is going to create the heavens and the earth, and he will change darkness and deep water to do it. Which one will God change first?

*God said, “Light exist!”
Light existed!*

The breath of God swept over the darkness on the surface of the deep water – *and darkness was changed*. The Hebrew word translated “light” has two other meanings that members of the ancient audience understood – *life and enlightenment*. No fire, lightning or heavenly bodies existed when God spoke, but we know “*ruach*” signified the “*presence of the breath of life.*” This imparts some very important wisdom.

- *God creates by changing things that exist.*
- *The process of creating begins with spoken words which are breathed into being.*
- *Through God’s breath “the light of life” was created.*

Pay close attention to what God does next.

And God saw that the light was TOV.

God’s standard is the **TOV Standard**. God examines what he creates to see whether it is “TOV” – *a word that appear seven times in the first story in Genesis*. Everything God creates, makes or does measures “TOV.”

*For something to measure TOV, it must protect lives,
preserve lives, make lives more functional and increase the quality of life.*

Now let’s compare the openings of the words of *Enuma Elish* to the *Bible*.

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- *In Enuma Elish, Apsu and Tiamat together created two gods by a sexual act.*
- *In the Bible, God alone created “the light of life” by speaking.*

The identify of God has expanded in three in verses:

God is the creator of TOV.

This god is eternally existent, removed from all corporeality, and independent of time and space. Creation comes about through his breath! We will soon learn that the Babylonian gods are very different.

I don't know about you, but I still get chill bumps when I read the first three verses of Genesis!

Shalom,
Jim Myers

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SOURCES

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