



From Creation to the Cross: Understanding the First Half of the Bible

By Albert H. Baylis

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Most Christians don't quite know what to do with the first half of the Bible. Some are fascinated by the historical sweep of the Old Testament. Others are blessed by its poetry. Still others focus on its prophecies. But what are the heart and soul of the Old Testament? In *From Creation to the Cross*, Al Baylis is a guide who shares with us his love for, and profound understanding of, the Old Testament. He walks us through the Old Testament, pointing out along the way perspectives and insights that leave us with a new, personal understanding of these thirty-nine books -- and more importantly, of the God of the Old Testament, who lovingly prepared the way before sending his Son. As Bruce Wilkinson puts it in the Foreword, "I could almost picture (Baylis) as a seasoned rabbi surrounded by a huddle of eager listeners. He doesn't simply teach the Old Testament; it's as if he personally reminisces through it." *From Creation to the Cross* is one of those rare books that speaks to a wide range of readers, from high school students to homemakers to college professors. This revised and expanded edition of *On the Way to Jesus* makes this unique and highly readable approach to the first half of the Bible available once again. It is ideally suited for use in Bible study groups.

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

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Chapter One The God of Creation (Genesis 1) Like many a modern parent faced with raising children in a confusing world of drugs, disasters, and mind-bending ideas, Moses must have had his concerns. Certainly God did. The book of Exodus tells us about the beginnings of the nation of Israel under the leadership of Moses, the man of God. It records their last-minute rescue through the sea and their camping trip in the desert of Sinai. But that is just the beginning. These former slaves must enter into a land inhabited by people who would make Hell's Angels seem like Sunday school teachers. As the patriarch lay down to sleep at night, he must have worried about this people he was leading. They had every mark of early adolescence about them, yet they needed a stability few adults ever achieve. Sure, they had witnessed God's power to plague and decimate the Egyptians. They had passed through the sea without muddying their feet. But had they really become the people of Yahweh in heart and mind?

How do you prepare a people to avoid the degrading tentacles of a deteriorated culture? How do you lay a foundation for a worthwhile life? What alloy do you use to strengthen their discernment and motivate them toward a better way? The answer is torah. Torah simply means instruction. The Torah came to be the name for the first five books of the Bible, Genesis through Deuteronomy. As we open the Bible we encounter that instruction—teaching given to prepare the Israelite people for their encounter with gross paganism. But oh, what teaching! No dull classroom recitation here. These are stories. And understanding the history in them is not the boring calisthenics of learning names, dates, and places but involvement with dynamic and crucial events giving us insight into life itself. **THE WORLD OF GENESIS ONE**

So, let's join Israel in the desert. Pack up your tent. Leave your modernized campers behind. Come as you are—and bring an appetite for manna! As Israelites, we owe our allegiance to Yahweh God in a world where many gods are worshiped. Their names are strange to our modern ears: Baal, Molech, Ashtoreth, Anath, and El. They have not survived the millennia, though they were drawing rave reviews in Palestine at the time. Stories about these gods form the belief-system of the world around us. These gods are like most people—and worse! They play and drink, and drink too much. They fight, deceive, and engage in licentious

behavior. Just to give you the idea, let's take a quick X-rated look at El, the father of the gods. El is a brutal, bloody tyrant. He not only dethrones his own father (not an unknown temptation for king's sons) but also castrates him. He slays his own favorite son, and cuts off his daughter's head. He also has a reputation for seduction of women.¹

But perhaps El is the exception. Certainly the goddesses must possess fine and gentle spirits! Well ... no. Consider the goddess Anath, called the "queen of heaven" and "mistress of all the gods."² She, too, is sensuous and violent. Here is a description (not recommended for children) of gentle Anath at work:

Anath hews in pieces and rejoices,

her liver extends with laughter,

her heart is filled with joy; for in Anath's hand is success;

for she plunges her knees in the blood of the swift ones,

her thighs in the gore of the fast ones.³

While the gods fight one another, Anath enjoys the carnage. If her father, the god El, does not grant Anath her request for a palace for Baal, then she assures us:

I shall trample him down like a lamb to the ground;

I shall bring down his hoary head with blood to the grave,

the gray hair of his old age with gore.⁴

No doubt this tale did a lot to encourage honoring one's father and mother in Canaanite culture!

Intrigue and murder, deceit and incest are what you get from these gods.⁵ Israel's Ten Commandments are broken without hesitation by these supposed divinities. These gods were not sterling examples. Could belief in them produce sterling civilizations? **THE NEED FOR THE TRUE CREATION STORY** These thoughts bring us face-to-face with a sobering fact. People become like the gods they worship. Their gods are their models. It would be disastrous if Israel thought Yahweh her God was like other gods. In fact, God warns his people that if they become as depraved as the people of Canaan, he will eject them from Palestine as well (Lev. 18:24–30). The Bible, then, begins with the most essential element of Torah—the real story about the true God—so the people of God may live a free and wholesome life.

But if we're trying to learn about God, why tell the story of creation? Doesn't that center on learning about the world? About origins? Geology? Not really. The Bible begins at the beginning not because Moses is a history buff obsessed with ancient chronology but because understanding God's creation of the world gives us a clear picture of what God is like. Notes

1 See W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 5th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 73.

2 U. Cassuto, *The Goddess Anath*, trans. by Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971), 65.

3 *Epic of Baal*, Tablet V AB, 2nd section, lines M, N, as translated in Cassuto, *The Goddess Anath*, 89.

4 *Ibid.*, Tablet V AB, 5th section, lines O, P, 99.

5 For examples of deceit and murder among gods see "A Babylonian Theogony" in ANET, 517–18. For intrigue among the gods see Enûma Elish, Tablet 1. For a more detailed coverage of pagan cosmology as the background of Genesis 1 see Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Significance of the Cosmology of Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," Andrews University Seminary Studies, 10 (1972): 19.

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