

A Study in the Greek: Katabole

by Howard R. Elseth

This chapter focuses on those verses which are translated "from or before the foundation of the world." This group of passages seem to cause considerable trouble for students of the Bible. Because of their significance these problem verses demand a chapter by themselves. Tremendous misunderstanding surround these following texts: Matthew 13:35: *"That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world."* (It should be noted that "of the world" does not occur in the Greek text.) Matthew 25:34: *"Then shall the king say unto them on the right hand, Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* Luke 11:50: *"That the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation."* John 17:24: *"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me, for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world."* Ephesians 1:4: *"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."* Hebrews 4:3: *"For we which have believed do enter, as he said, I have sworn in my wrath, If they shall enter into my rest, although the works were finished from the foundation of the world."* Hebrews 9:26: *"For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world, but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."* Hebrews 11:11: *"Through faith Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised."* (Note: "conceive" here is the same word as is translated "foundation" in the other verses.) I Peter 1:20: *"Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."* Revelation 13:8: *"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him whose names are not written in the book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."* Revelation 17:8: *"The beast that thou sawest was, and is not, and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition, and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."*

Each of these passages at first glance seems to carry the concept of time, before the creation of the earth or world. However, not one of these passages contains any Greek word that specifically denotes the idea of time, except perhaps for the passage concerning Sarah (Heb. 11:11), which may refer to her old age. Some scholars suggest that the word "foundation" conveys the idea of "being rooted in the very being of God" but does not in any way convey the idea of time.

In addition, there is ample evidence that the phrase "from the foundation of the world" is mistranslated and should read, "because of the disintegration of the inhabitants." This was discovered upon an intensive study of the Greek words, apo (pro), itatabole and hosmos,

which make up the Greek phrase in each of the above passages (except Heb. 11:11). It is commonly translated "from (or before when the preposition pro is used) the foundation of the world." The key word in this phrase is *izatabole*.

The study covered eight major areas: (1) The origin of these words; (2) the use of these words in Classical Greek and in Hellenistic Greek; (3) the Hebrew equivalents; (4) contemporary usage in non-Biblical literature; (5) words with similar meaning and which could be used interchangeably; (6) how the New Testament writers vary in the use of these words; (7) traditional use of these words by early church fathers; (8) and finally a study was made of the basic doctrines to which these words relate and how they relate.

When one begins to launch an intensive study on this phrase, one quickly discovers something that is absolutely incredible. Major theological works on *apo* (pro) *katabole* and *kosmos* tend to spend a great amount of time and space on *apo* (pro), and *kosmos* which have obvious meaning and agreement. Many works will devote page after page, five, ten, even over twenty-five pages to *kosmos*, yet no work or study was I able to find that devoted more than a half a page to *katabole*. Yet this tiny word (*katabole*) probably determines 80-90 percent of our present-day theology. It all starts with our present view of God. Certainly if we accept that God knows all of our future choices, if we accept that Christ was slain before the foundation (*katabole*) of the world, if we accept that the prophets were slain before the foundation (*katabole*) of the world, if we accept that we were chosen before the foundation (*katabole*) of the world, if we accept that we were written in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation (*katabole*) of the world--then we are guilty of allowing the small word *katabole*, of which we know little about, to determine most of our theology. Once we accept the traditional view of foreknowledge, this then colors our view of redemption (personal salvation), evangelism, prayer, eschatology, etc.

Let us take a closer look at *katabole*. In the biological sense, scientists speak of the catabolic (*katabole*) process, meaning the disintegration of food. They may also speak in terms of destructive metabolism. Catastrophe and catatonic are also related words.

We are not trying to say *katabole* has never been used for *foundation*, but we will prove that this is not its usage in the Bible. *Katabole* has also been used for the idea of *payment*. In addition to *payment* it has been used for an *illness*, such as an epileptic seizure. Thus we see, like many words, *katabole* has been used a number of different ways. Our purpose here is to find out its exact usage in the Bible.

As we look a little closer at *katabole*, we notice that its usage for *foundation* is quite limited. Let us first look at The Classic Greek Dictionary by Follet Publishing Company. This dictionary was prepared by George Ricker Berry, Ph.D., late professor of Semitic Languages at Colgate University and the University of Chicago. This dictionary has had over fifteen printings. It has both Greek to English and English to Greek. In the English-to-Greek section under the word "*foundation*" about thirteen Greek words for foundation are listed. *Katabole* is not even listed. Neither does he list it under *funder* or *founding*, of which he lists about twelve different words.

Themelion or *themelios* is the first word on his list for *foundation*. *Themelios* is also the most frequent word for *foundation* in the Bible. It is ironic that this word is used as the primary word for *foundation*, either figuratively or literally, and yet not once is it used in any of these ten phrases. Furthermore, outside of these ten phrases *katabole* is not once used for *foundation* in the Old Testament (LXX) or in the New Testament. The following is a list of verses in the Old Testament (LXX) where *foundation* is found. In each of these cases the Greek word is *themelios*, and not once is *katabole* found. If *katabole* means *foundation*, why is it not used at least once where it is obvious? (O.T.: Joshua 6:26, Ezra 3:6, 10, 11, 12, Job 22:16, Ps. 87:1, Is. 28:16, 16, 44:28, 48:13, Ezek. 13:14. N.T.: Luke 6:48, 14:29, Acts 16:26, Ro. 15:20, I Cor. 3:10, 11, 12, Eph. 2:20, I Tim. 6:19, II Tim. 2:19, Heb. 1:10, 6:1, Rev. 21:14, 21:19). (There are couple of other words for *foundation*; however, their usage is quite limited.) In Hebrews 6:1 we find both *katabole* and *themelios* in the same sentence. It is important to note that *katabole* is not translated *foundation*: rather, *themelios* is. *Katabole* is given the concept of *disintegration* or *going backwards*.

We have seen how *themelios* is used in the Old Testament (LXX) and the New Testament. Now let us look at *katabole* in the Old Testament (LXX). The LXX is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament and was the book the disciples read and studied. It makes sense that if they wrote in Greek they also read in Greek. In the LXX *katabole* occurs in the verb form, *kataballo*, about thirty times. Each time it is translated with the idea of: *cast down*, *overthrow*, *felled*, *destroy*, etc., and not once with the idea of *foundation*.

If you were an unlearned fisherman reading the Old Testament (LXX) and you came across this word *katabole* (verb form *kataballo*) over thirty times and not once used for the concept of *foundation*, but always with the idea of *destruction*, *cut down*, or *disintegration*, how would you use the word in the New Testament? Further, would it not only confuse matters to use a word for *foundation* in the New Testament that does not carry that meaning anywhere in the Old Testament? Would this not confuse the readers? Why not use *themelios*, which was the common word for *foundation*, if they really meant *foundation*? Why allow for confusion on such an important issue? The following is a list of the usage of *katabole* in its English translation (*kataballo*--verb form) in the Old Testament LXX and in the New Testament. (O.T.: II Sam. 20:15, cast or thrown down; II Kings 3:19, shall fall or cut down; 3:25, felled or cut down; 6:5, felling; 19:7, fall (by the sword); II Chron. 32:21, slew or cut down; Job 16:14, breaketh; Ps. 37:14, cast down, 73:18, cast them down; Ps. 106:26, overthrow; 106:27, overthrow; 140:10, cast; Prov. 7:26, cast down; 18:8, go down; 25:28, broken down; Jer. 19:7, fall; Ezek. 6:4, cast down; 23:25, shall fall; 26:4, shall destroy; 26:4, break down; 26:9, break down; 32:12, to fall; 33:4, take him away; 39:3, fall. N.T.: II Cor. 4:9, cast down; Heb. 6:1, not laying again or going back or disintegration; Rev. 12:10, cast down. How can anybody read through each of these verses and see the consistent usage of *katabole* (verb form *kataballo*) as *cast down*, *break down*, *disintegration*, etc., and then proceed to translate it in ten passages as *foundation*?

Some further thoughts on these all-important words *apo* (pro), *katabole*, and *kosmos*. We must remind ourselves, as has been stated, that whenever we find evidence that puts a passage or several passages in question, these passages cannot be used to interpret Scripture: rather, reoccurring evidence from other passages must be used to shed light on the passages that are in question. If we do this with these passages, we practically destroy the argument for the absolute foreknowledge of God as commonly taught.

Further studies on these words *apo* (pro), *katabole*, and *kosmos* ("from the foundation of the world") show that the word "*apo*" can be translated "from" or "because." Upon this there is no disagreement among scholars. "*Kosmos*" is generally known as the sum of creation with man at the center, and upon this there is no disagreement among scholars. But the problem arises when we discuss the interpretation of the meaning of "*katabole*." The overwhelming evidence supports the idea of *destruction*, *downfall* or *disintegration* as far as the Bible is concerned. Furthermore, when translators are deciding the usage of any given word, they must consider necessity, context and logic. After all, this is how any unknown language is broken down. Translators must look for reoccurring evidence and patterns and associations of words, etc. To translate *katabole* as *disintegration* fits, necessity, context, and logic. It fits into the harmony of its root word. It occurs over thirty times in the Old Testament (LXX) and not once is it translated *foundation*; always with the idea of *disintegration*. How then can it be translated *foundation* in the New Testament? A very weak argument is that the Old Testament (LXX) uses a verb form, while the New Testament uses a noun form. This is weakened by the fact that *themelios* is used as both in the noun and verb forms (*foundation* and *founded*). It is further weakened by the fact that the usage of *katabole* for *foundation* is extremely limited. Further, every author in the New Testament that used *katabole* also used the word *themelios* and knew their meanings. They knew the similarity between nouns and verbs. Why not pick an obvious word for *foundation*? Why not at least use *themelios* once in these ten phrases? Is there not a similarity between jumper and jumped? Still some Greek teachers teach as if the noun does not generally follow the verb, and vice-versa. As has been said, there are usually exceptions to most rules. The exception is not the rule, however. One need only go through every verb and noun form in the New Testament and he will be surprised to notice that there is great harmony between verbs and nouns. Several examples related to *katabole* and *katallo* will be cited.

Noun

anabole--that which is thrown up (mound of dirt), a putting off, delay.

apobole--a throwing away, a casting away, loss .

diabolos - devil, slander, false accusation.

ekbole--ejection, casting out, throwing

Verb

anaballo--(to toss up-as a mound of dirt) put off, delay

apoballo--throw away, to lose

diaballo--throw over, slander, accuse falsely

ekballo--to eject, cast out

overboard.

parabole--that which is thrown alongside, *paraballo*--to throw alongside,
comparison, parabole compare

katabole -disintegration *kataballo*--to cast down, throw
down, cut down, destroyed

In Greek the rule is that there is harmony between the verb and the noun, though there are also exceptions. In addition, if the disciples were trying to communicate a time concept "before or from the foundation of the world," they not only used the wrong word for *foundation* (why not use *themelios* which is obvious?), but they also used the wrong word for world. Why use *kosmos* to denote *world* or *earth* when it basically refers to *man* and not the *earth* or *world*? In John 3:16: "For God so loved the *kosmos* (people) not the *gee* (earth or world)." There will be a new heaven and a new *gee* (earth or world) not a new people. *Kosmos* occurs about 175 times in the New Testament, and it is obvious from the context that about 150 times it should be translated *inhabitants* or *people*. The remaining 25 times could go either way, but based on logic and reoccurring evidence, it is more likely that it should always be translated inhabitants (the sum of creation with man at the center). *Gee*, on the other hand, occurs about 200 times in the New Testament, and about 175 of these times it is obvious from the context that it should be rendered as *earth* and not refer to the people. About 25 times it could go either way in context, but again we are reminded by the law of reoccurring evidence. More than likely it should always be rendered *earth*. Why was not *gee* used at least once (or all the time) instead of *kosmos*? If *gee* were used in combination with *themelios*, the meaning would be obvious, as in Hebrews 1:10. Here, we have both *themelios* and *gee* used. "And, thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation (*themelios*) of the earth (*gee*)..."

Kosmos is used in the Old Testament (LXX) about 25 times, and 8 different Hebrew words are used as synonyms or equivalents, which are in turn used about 793 times, all basically in harmony. *Gee* occurs about 2,760 times in the Old Testament (LXX) with 23 Hebrew equivalents which occur about 11,734 times in the Old Testament.

Katabole occurs about 30 times in the Old Testament (LXX) with 9 Hebrew equivalents which occur about 1500 times, always carrying the meaning of *disintegration, fall down, cut down, destroy, etc.* *Themelios* occurs about 40 times and has 8 equivalents which occur about 931 times with harmony. *Apo* is used along with its equivalents over 5,000 times and *pro* about 150 times. In the light of all of this evidence, how is it possible that we could mess up on such important passages?

We look for further evidence. *Katabole* is made up of two words. First let us look at *kata*. *Kata* is used as a prefix for over 130 different words in the New Testament. These words occur over 800 times. *Kata* as a prefix generally carries the idea of down, or a situation of intensity. *Ballo* occurs about 130 times in the New Testament. It carries the meaning of cast down or cast into 105 times; *strike down* - 1; *thrust* - 8; *send* or *bring judgment* - 3; *to put* (with relationship to *destruction, intensity* or *burden*)- 13. *Bole* occurs by itself in Luke 22:21 and is translated *cast*.

The fact that there was an error made in the translation of the word "*katabole*" is strongly evidenced by the writings of one of the most prominent early Church Fathers, Origen, who was born in Alexandria in 185 A.D. and died in 254 A.D. The noted historian, Dr. K. R. Hegenbach in his work *History of Doctrines*, states of Origen that, "He is undoubtedly the most eminent writer of the whole period, and the best representative of the spiritualizing tendency."¹ Dr. Hegenbach continues, "The doctrine of omniscience was to some extent mixed up with anthropomorphic ideas, and even Origen puts limits to this attribute of God, as well as to his omnipotence."²

So what does Origen, who lived shortly after the books and letters of the New Testament were written, say about the phrase "before the foundation"? Origen writes, "This point, indeed, is not to be idly passed by, that the holy Scriptures have called the creation of the world by a new and peculiar name, terming it 'katabole,' which has been very improperly translated into Latin by 'constitution for in Greek '*katabole*' signifies rather 'dejectere,' i.e., to cast downwards,--a word which has been, as we have already remarked, improperly translated into Latin by the phrase 'constitutio mundi.'...From this it follows, that by the use of the word 'katabole,' a descent from a higher to a lower condition, shared by all in common, would seem to be pointed out."³

So much of our theology, as has been said, has been determined by our lack of understanding of this phrase. When you add up the sum total of facts and evidence, you have over 20,000 words, phrases and verses all in harmony that stand directly opposed to our present translation of these ten verses. In addition to this we have over 11,000 times in which there is an indication that God has changed His mind. Why do we still persist in translating *katabole* as foundation? Perhaps one clue is our translators. I was talking to a translator in Israel. I asked him what he would do if while in the process of translating a verse, he discovered the Greek or Hebrew contradicted his theology? He stated that he would go with his theology! I said, "What if you're wrong?" Here lies a serious problem. Do we accept the Bible as it was written and our authority or do we impose our ideas upon the Scripture and make God into the image we want?

Again we look at the Geneva Bible, and guess what? It almost sounds like a broken record. The King James boys were at it again, copying instead of translating. They were so lazy at this point that they plagiarized almost word for word, as you will soon see. I will list each of the passages that we are concerned with: first with the King James, then with the Geneva version, and finally how the Biblical evidence obligates us to translate *apo* (or pro) *katabole*, and *kosmos*.

Verse	KJV	Geneva	Should be Translated
Matthew 13:35	"That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, I will open	"That if might be fulfilled, which was fpoken by the Prophet, faying, I	"I will utter things which have been kept secret because of (apo) the disintegration*

	my mouth in parables. I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. " (Note-kosmos or world does not occur in the Greek.)	will open my mouth in parables, & will utter the things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.	(katabole)." *Disintegration is a closer translation to the Greek. Moral decay, though not as accurate, could be used for the translation.
Matthew 25:34	"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. "	"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father: inherit ye the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."	"...prepared for you because of (apo) the disintegration (katabole) of the inhabitants (kosmos)..." Kosmos is translated inhabitant rather than world, since inhabitant describes both the habitat and the dweller.
Luke 11:50	"That the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation."	"That the blood of all the Prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation."	"...which was shed because of (apo) the disintegration (katabole) of the inhabitants (kosmos) . . ."
John 17:24	"Father, I will that they also, whom thou has given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me, for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world."	"Father, I will that they which thou hast given me, be with me even where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."	"...for thou lovest me in front of (in plain view, or can be prior or, before due to preposition pro) the disintegration (katabole) of the inhabitants (kosmos.)"(Acts 5:23 "...standing without before (pro) the doors." Acts 12:24 "...and told how Peter stood before (pro) the gate.")
Ephesians 1:4	"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."	"As he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, we should be holy, & without blame before him in love:"	"...He hath chosen us in Him in plain view (pro) of the disintegration (katabole) of the inhabitants (kosmos). . ."

Hebrews 4:3	"For we which have believed do enter, as he said, I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest. Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. "	"For we which haue beleued, do enter into reft, as he faid (to the others-- added in by GV) As I haue fworne in my wrath, If they fhall enter into my reft: although the workes were finifhed from the foundation of the worlde."	"...Although the works were finished because of (apo) the disintegration (katabole) of the inhabitants (kosmos)."
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Verse	KJV	Geneva	Should be Translated
Hebrews 9:26	"For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world, but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."	"For then muft he haue often fuffred fince the fondacion of the worlde) but now in the end of the worlde hath he appeared once to put away finne, by the facrifice of himfelf."	"...For then must he often have suffered since or because of (apo) the disintegration (rebellion) (katabole) of the inhabitants (kosmos) . . . "
Hebrews 11:11	"Through faith Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised."	"Through faith Sarra alfo receiued ftrength to conceiue fede, and was deliuered of a childe when fhe was paft age, becaufe fhe judged him faithful which had promifed."	(There are some textual tamperings with this verse. Abraham probably is the subject rather than Sarah.) "Through faith Abraham (or Sarah) received strength for seed in his (or her) disintegration (or physical condition of age--katabole)..." (age is implied in the text by helikia--kairos, age or time is not denoted in any of the other passages by a Greek word)
I Peter	"Who verily was	"Which was	"Who having been

<p>1:20</p>	<p>foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."</p>	<p>ordained before the fundacion of the worlde, but was declared in the left times for your fakes."</p>	<p>previously known (proginosko) in plain view of the disintegration (katabolechaotic) of the inhabitants (kosmos), He was manifested in these last times for you. (Previously known may refer to the public crucifixion and resurrection, see verse 19, and manifested or revealed may refer to personal salvation, much more work needs to be invested to find the treasure that this verse contains.)"</p>
<p>Revelation 13:8</p>	<p>"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."</p>	<p>"Therefore all that dwell vpon the earth, fhall worfhip him, whofe names are not writen in the Boke of life of the Lambe, which was flain from the beginning of the worlde."</p>	<p>"...whose names are not written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain because of the disintegration (katabole - breakdown, downfall, moral decay) of the inhabitants (kosmos)."</p>
<p>Revelation 17:8</p>	<p>"The beast that thou sawest was, and is not, and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition. And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."</p>	<p>"The beaft that thou haft fene, was, and is not, and fhall afcende out of the bottomles pit, and fhall go into perdicion, and they that dwell on the earth, fhall wondre (whofe names are not writen in the Boke of life from the fundacion of the worlde) when they beholde the beaft that was, and is not, and yet is."</p>	<p>"...whose names are not written in the Book of Life because of (apo) the disintegration (katabole-downfall) of the inhabitants (kosmos)..."</p>

1. Hagenbach, K. R., *History of Doctrine*, trans. by Henry B. Smith, New York: Sheldon & Company (1861). Volume I, p. 72.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

3. Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chapter V, from *The AnteNicene Fathers*, ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, revised by Cleveland Core, New York: Scribner's & Sons (1902), VolumeIV,p.342.

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