

# GENESIS

## Genesis

Exodus	1 Samuel	Esther	Jeremiah	Jonah
Leviticus	2 Samuel	Job	Lamentations	Micah
Numbers	1 Kings	Psalms	Ezekiel	Nahum
Deuteronomy	2 Kings	Proverbs	Daniel	Habakkuk
Joshua	1 Chronicles	Ecclesiastes	Hosea	Zephaniah
Judges	2 Chronicles	Song of	Joel	Haggai
Ruth	Ezra	Solomon	Amos	Zechariah
	Nehemiah	Isaiah	Obadiah	Malachi

## OUTLINE

Key theme Beginnings

Key verse “In the beginning God ...”(1:1)

### I. GOD CREATES THE UNIVERSE (1)

### II. ADAM AND EVE (2—5)

A. The garden—2

B. The fall—3

C. The consequences of the fall—4—5

### III. NOAH AND HIS FAMILY (6:1—11:9)

A. The flood—6—7

B. The new earth—8

C. The covenant—9

D. The nations—10

E. The tower of Babel—11:1—9

### IV. ABRAHAM AND SARAH (11:10—25:11)

The beginning of the Hebrew nation

### V. ISAAC AND REBEKAH (25:12—28:22)

### VI. JACOB AND HIS FAMILY (29:1—38:30)

The building of the Hebrew nation

### VII. JOSEPH AND HIS MINISTRY (39:1—50:26)

The protecting of the Hebrew nation

Note the ten “generations” in Genesis: the heavens and earth (1:1—2:46); Adam (5:1—6:8); Noah (6:9—9:29); Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1—11:9); Shem (11:10—26); Terah (11:27—25:11); Ishmael (25:12—18); Isaac (25:19—35:29); Esau (36:1—37:1); Jacob (37:2—50:26).

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Genesis 1:1**

## **BC: BEFORE CREATION**

In spite of its name “Genesis,” which means “beginning,” and in spite of its position as the first book in the Bible, the book of Genesis isn’t the beginning of everything. Genesis 1:1 reminds us, “In the beginning God.” So, before we study the basics that are laid down in Genesis 1—11, let’s acquaint ourselves with what God did before what’s recorded in Genesis. After that, we’ll examine what He did that’s recorded in Genesis, and finally, what occurred after Genesis. This will give us the kind of broad overview we need to study the rest of God’s revelation in the Bible.

### **Before Genesis: redemption planned**

What was happening before God spoke the universe into existence? That may seem like an impractical hypothetical question, like “How many angels can stand on the point of a pin?” but it isn’t.<sup>1</sup> After all, God doesn’t act arbitrarily, and the fact that He created something suggests that He must have had some magnificent purposes in mind. What, then, was the situation before Genesis 1:1, and what does it teach us about God and ourselves?

God existed in sublime glory. God is eter-

nal; He has neither beginning nor ending. Therefore, He is totally self-sufficient and needs nothing more than Himself in order to exist or to act. “God has a voluntary relation to everything He has made,” wrote A. W. Tozer, “but He has no necessary relation to anything outside of Himself.”<sup>2</sup> God needs nothing, neither the material universe nor the human race, and yet He created both.

If you want something to boggle your mind, meditate on the concept of the eternal, that which has neither beginning nor ending. As creatures of time, you and I can easily focus on the transient things around us, but it’s difficult if not impossible to conceive of that which is eternal.<sup>3</sup> Contemplating the nature and character of the Triune God who always was, always is, and always will be, and who never changes, is a task that overwhelms us. “In the beginning God.”

Moses wrote, “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Ps. 90:2 niv). Frederick Faber expressed it like this:

Timeless, spaceless, single, lonely,<sup>4</sup>  
 Yet sublimely Three,  
 Thou art grandly, always, only  
 God in unity!<sup>5</sup>

“Process theology,” an old heresy in modern dress, affirms a “limited god” who is in the process of

becoming a “greater” god. But if God is God, as we understand the word, then He is eternal and needs nothing; and He is all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present. In order to have a “limited god,” you must first redefine the very word “God,” because by definition God cannot be limited.

Furthermore, if God is limited and “getting greater,” then what power is making Him greater? That power would be greater than “God” and therefore be God! And wouldn’t that give us two gods instead of one?<sup>6</sup> But the God of the Bible is eternal and had no beginning. He is infinite and knows no limitations in either time or space. He is perfect and cannot “improve,” and is immutable and cannot change.

The God that Abraham worshipped is the eternal God (Gen. 21:33), and Moses told the Israelites, “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut. 33:27 *niḃ*). Habakkuk said that God was “from everlasting” (Hab. 1:12, and see 3:6), and Paul called Him “the everlasting [eternal] God” (Rom. 16:26; see 1 Tim. 1:17).

The divine Trinity was in loving-comunion. “In the beginning God” would be a startling statement to a citizen of Ur of the Chaldees where Abraham came from, because the Chaldeans and all their neighbors worshipped a galaxy of greater and lesser gods and goddesses. But the God of Genesis is the only true God and has no “rival gods” to contend with, such as you read about in the myths and fables from the ancient world. (See Ex. 15:1; 20:3; Deut. 6:4; 1 Kings 8:60; 2 Kings 19:15; Ps. 18:31.)

This one true God exists as three Persons: God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. (See Matt. 3:16–17; 28:18–20;<sup>7</sup> John 3:34–35; 14:15–17; Acts 2:32–33, 38–39; 10:36–38; 1 Cor. 12:1–6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 1:3–14; 4:1–6; 2 Thess. 2:13–14; Titus 3:4–6; 1 Peter 1:1–2.) This doesn’t mean that one God manifests Himself in three different forms, or that there are three gods; it means that one God exists in three Persons who are equal in their attributes and yet individual and distinct in their offices and ministries. As the Nicene Creed (AD 325) states it, “We believe in one God—And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father—And in the Holy Ghost.”

I once heard a minister open a worship service by praying, “Father, thank You for dying for us on the cross.” But it was God the Son, not God the Father, who died for sinners on the cross, and it is God the Holy Spirit who convicts lost sinners and brings them to repentance and salvation. To scramble and confuse the Persons of the divine Godhead is to change what is taught in Scripture, and this is a dangerous thing to do.

The doctrine of the Trinity wasn’t clearly revealed in the Old Testament, because the emphasis in the Old Testament is that the God of Israel is one God, uncreated and unique, the only true God. Worshipping the false gods of their neighbors was the great temptation

and repeated sin of Israel, so Moses and the prophets hammered away on the unity and uniqueness of Israel’s God. Even today, the faithful Jewish worshiper recites “The Shema” each day: “Hear [shema], O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut. 6:4–5 *nkjḃ*). The God revealed in Scripture has no peers and no rivals.

But the Old Testament does give glimpses and hints of the wonderful truth of the Trinity, a truth that would later be clearly revealed in the New Testament by Christ and the apostles. The “let us” statements in Genesis (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; see also Isa. 6:8) suggest that the Persons of the Godhead worked together in conference, and the many instances when “the angel of the Lord” appeared on the scene indicate the presence of the Son of God. (See Gen. 16:7–11; 21:17; 22:11, 15; 24:7; 40; 31:11; 32:24–20; Ex. 3:1–4 with Acts 7:30–34; 14:19; 23:20–26; 32:33–33:17; Josh. 5:13ff.; Judg. 2:1–5 and 6:11ff.)

Messiah (God the Son) speaks about Himself, the Spirit, and the Lord (Father) in Isaiah 48:16–17 and 61:1–3, and Psalm 2:7 states that Jehovah has a son. Jesus applied verse 7 to Himself when He challenged His enemies who did not accept Him as the Son of God (Matt. 22:41–46). In Genesis 1:2 and 6:3, the Spirit of God is distinguished from the Lord (Father), and this same distinction is found in Numbers 27:18; Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 40:13; 48:16; and Haggai 2:4–5.

Though the word “trinity” is nowhere used in the Bible, the doctrine is certainly there, hidden in the Old Testament and revealed in the New Testament. Does this profound and mysterious doctrine have any practical meaning for the believer today? Yes, because the three Persons of the Godhead are all involved in planning and executing the divine will for the universe, including the plan of salvation.

The divine Trinity planned redemption. The wonderful plan of redemption wasn’t a divine afterthought, for God’s people were chosen in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4; Rev. 17:8) and given by the Father to the Son both to belong to His kingdom (Matt. 25:34) and to share His glory (John 17:2, 6, 9, 11–12, 24). The sacrificial death of the Son wasn’t an accident, it was an appointment (Acts 2:23; 4:27–28), for He was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8).

In the counsels of eternity, the Godhead determined to create a world that would include humans made in the image of God. The Father was involved in Creation (Gen. 1:1; 2 Kings 19:15; Acts 4:24), but so were the Son (John 1:1–3, 10; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2) and the Holy Spirit (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30). God didn’t create a world because He needed anything but that He might share His love with creatures who, unlike the angels, are made in the image of God and can respond willingly to His love.

The Godhead determined that the Son would come to earth and die for the sins of the world, and Jesus

came to do the Father's will (John 10:17–18; Heb. 10:7). The words Jesus spoke were from the Father (John 14:24), and the works He did were commissioned by the Father (5:17–21, 36; Acts 2:22) and empowered by the Spirit (10:38). The Son glorifies the Father (John 14:13; 17:1, 4) and the Spirit glorifies the Son (16:14). The Persons of the Holy Trinity work together to accomplish the divine will.

According to Ephesians 1:3–14, the plan of salvation is Trinitarian: we are chosen by the Father (vv. 3–6), purchased by the Son (vv. 7–12), and sealed by the Spirit (vv. 13–14), and all of this is to the praise of God's glory (vv. 6, 12, 14).<sup>8</sup> The Father has given authority to the Son to give eternal life to those He has given to the Son (John 17:1–3). All of this was planned before there was ever a world!

It's important to see that all three Persons in the Godhead share in the salvation of lost sinners. As far as God the Father is concerned, I was saved when He graciously chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world, but I knew nothing about divine election until after I was converted.<sup>9</sup> As far as God the Son is concerned, I was saved when He died for me on the cross, and I knew that great truth from the earliest days of my life. But as far as God the Holy Spirit is concerned, I was saved in May 1945 when the Spirit of God convicted me and I trusted Jesus Christ. Then what God had planned from eternity all fell into place in my life.

Spiritual birth is something like human birth: you experience it but it takes time to understand it! After all, I wouldn't know my own birthdate if somebody hadn't told me. It's after we've been born into God's family that the wonder of it all is revealed to us from the Word, and then we want to share it with others.

When you seek to fathom the depths of the divine eternal counsels, you will be overwhelmed. But don't be discouraged, for over the centuries, good and godly scholars have disagreed in their speculations and conclusions. One of my seminary professors used to remind us, "Try to explain these things and you may lose your mind; but try to explain them away, and you will lose your soul."

Moses said it best: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29 nkjv). The important thing is not knowing all that God knows but doing all God tells us to do. "For we know in part" (1 Cor. 13:9).

### **Genesis: redemption promised**

When He wrote the Bible, God didn't give us a ponderous theology book divided into sections labeled God, Creation, Man, ~~Sin~~, so forth. Instead, He gave us a story, a narrative that begins in eternity past and ends in eternity future. It's a story about God and His dealings with all kinds of people and how they responded to His Word. As we read these narratives, we learn a great deal about God, ourselves, and our world,

and we discover that our own personal story is found somewhere in the pages of Scripture. If you read long enough and honestly enough, you will meet yourself in the Bible.

In our versions of the Bible, there are fifty chapters in Genesis, but the original Hebrew text isn't divided. After describing the creation (1:1–2:3), Moses listed eleven "generations" that comprise the Genesis narrative: the heavens and the earth (2:4–4:26); Adam (5:1–6:8); Noah (6:9–9:29); Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1–11:9), with an emphasis on Shem, father of the Semites (11:10–26); Terah, father of Abraham (11:27–25:11); Ishmael (25:12–18); Isaac (25:19–35:29); Esau (36:1–8), who is also Edom (36:9–37:1); and Jacob (37:2–50:26). These are the individuals presented in Genesis.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis deal with humanity in general and focus on four great events: creation (1–2), the fall of man and its consequences (3–5), the flood (6–9), and the rebellion at Babel (10–11). The rest of Genesis focuses on Israel in particular (12–50) and recounts the lives of four great men: Abraham (12:1–25:18), Isaac (25:19–27:46), Jacob (28–36), and Joseph (37–50).<sup>10</sup> We call these men the "patriarchs" because they were the founding fathers of the Hebrew nation.

As you study Genesis, keep in mind that Moses didn't write a detailed history of each person or event. He recorded only those things that helped him achieve his purpose, which was to explain the origin of things, especially the origin of the Jewish nation. Genesis 1–11 is a record of failure, but with the call of Abraham, God made a new beginning. Man's sin had brought God's curse (3:14, 17; 4:11), but God's gracious covenant with Abraham brought blessing to the whole world (12:1–3).

You will also notice in the Genesis record that when man does his worst and reaches his lowest, God gives him a new beginning. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan said that the cycle in Genesis is "generation, degeneration, and regeneration."<sup>11</sup> Cain killed Abel, but God gave Seth to continue the godly line. The earth became violent and wicked, so God wiped out humanity but chose Noah and his family to carry on His work. Out of pagan Ur of the Chaldees, God called Abraham and Sarah and gave them a son, Isaac, and the future of God's plan of salvation rested with that son. Isaac and Rebekah had two sons, Esau and Jacob, but God rejected Esau and chose Jacob to build the twelve tribes of Israel and inherit the covenant blessings.

In other words, from beginning to end, Genesis is the story of God's sovereign will and electing grace. This doesn't suggest that the persons in the story were mere robots, because they made mistakes and even tried to thwart God's plans. But whenever people resisted God's rule, He overruled and accomplished His divine purposes anyway. "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11 nkjv).

What begins in Genesis is developed throughout the Bible and then finds its fulfillment in the book of Revelation, as you can see from this summary:

<b>Genesis</b>	<b>Revelation</b>
The first heaven and earth	The new heaven and earth
The first garden; the Tree of Life guarded	The “garden city” and the Tree of Life available
The first marriage	The last marriage, the marriage of the Lamb
Satan tempts Eve to sin	Satan thrown into the lake of fire
Death enters the scene	“No more death”
Babylon built	Babylon destroyed
The Redeemer promised	The Redeemer reigns

There are many more comparisons and contrasts between these two books, but this gives you some idea of how important Genesis is to an understanding of God’s program and the rest of Scripture.

### After Genesis: redemption accomplished

God revealed His great plan of salvation gradually. First, He gave a promise (Gen. 3:15), the first salvation promise found in the Bible. It’s the promise of a Redeemer who would be born of a woman, defeat Satan, and bring salvation to mankind. The promised Savior would be a man and not an angel and would save humans and not fallen angels (Heb. 2:5–18).

Where would this promised Redeemer come from? Genesis 12:1–3 answers that question: the Redeemer will be a Jew, from the people of Abraham. Through a miracle of God, Abraham and Sarah had Isaac, and Isaac was the father of Jacob. But Jacob had twelve sons who founded the twelve tribes of Israel. Which of them would give the world the Savior? Genesis 49:10 tells us: the Redeemer will come from the tribe of Judah.

The book of Exodus tells how God built the great Hebrew nation as they suffered in the land of Egypt and then delivered them by His great power. They should have claimed their inheritance in Canaan, but in unbelief they disobeyed God and ended up wandering forty years in the wilderness (Num. 13–14). Joshua led the new generation into the land and there established the nation.

After the tragic era of the rule of the judges and the reign of Saul, recorded in Judges and 1 Samuel, God anointed David as king and revealed that the promised Redeemer would come from David’s family (2 Sam. 7). He would not only be “the son of David,” but he

would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David (Mic. 5:2). Through Isaiah the prophet, God announced that the Redeemer would be born of a virgin in a miraculous way (Isa. 7:14; see Luke 1:26–38).

Of course, throughout the Old Testament ages, Satan did all he could to thwart the plans of God. Cain belonged to the devil (1 John 3:12) and killed his brother Abel, but God gave Seth to continue the godly line (Gen. 4:25–26). During the flood, God preserved Noah and his family, and from the family of Shem, Abraham was born, the father of the Hebrew nation.

On at least four occasions, the godly line was threatened with extinction. Twice Abraham lied about Sarah his wife and she was taken by pagan rulers (12:10–20; 20:1ff.), and his son Isaac committed the same sin and jeopardized his wife Rebekah (26:6–16). During the dark days of the later Hebrew monarchy, the wicked Queen Mother Athaliah had all the royal sons slain, but one little prince, Joash, was rescued to continue the Davidic line (2 Kings 11).

How did it all end? “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Gal. 5:4–5 *nkjv*). The angel announced to the shepherds, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

The promise had been fulfilled! And it all started in Genesis!

Now let’s join Moses and read his magnificent inspired record of the creation of the heaven, the earth, and human life.

### Notes

- 1 It’s doubtful that the ancient theologians ever asked this particular question, but the topic isn’t totally irrelevant. Angels are spirits and have no physical bodies, except temporarily when sent on special missions; so how do they occupy space? Thomas Aquinas discussed the matter in his *Summa Theologica*; the question is important.
- 2 A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 39.
- 3 Of course, every human being will exist forever, either in heaven or hell, but as far as this world is concerned, we’re all strangers and pilgrims “only passing through.”
- 4 “Lonely” doesn’t suggest that God needed friends. The word means “solitary.”
- 5 A.W. Tozer, *The Christian Book of Mystical Verse* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1963), 7.
- 6 In our day, “process theology” grew out of the teachings of the British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), and his disciple Charles Hartshorne gave it wide exposure. Process theology was popularized by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner in his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Kushner claimed that God was too weak now to do anything about cancer, war, and the tragedies of life; but as we trust Him and do good, we strengthen Him to do better. For the evangelical point of view, see *On Process Theology* edited by Ronald H. Nash (Baker Book House, 1987), and

my book *Why Us? When Bad Things Happen to God's People* (Fleming H. Revell, 1984).

- 7 The conjunction “and” in the Christian baptismal formula is important, for it shows the equality of the Persons of the Godhead.
- 8 The doctrine of divine election is not an excuse to not share the gospel with others. The same God who ordained the end—the salvation of the lost—has also ordained the means to the end, which is the witness of His people and their prayers for success for His Word. God chooses people to salvation and then calls them by His gospel (2 Thess. 2:13–14). The two go together. We don’t know who the elect are, and we have been ordered to take the gospel to the whole world (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8).
- 9 Dr. H.A. Ironside, for eighteen years pastor of Chicago’s Moody Church, used to illustrate this truth by describing a door, over which hung a sign that read, “Whoever will may come.” Believing that, you walked through the door and were saved. Then you looked back and read another sign hanging over the inside of the door: “Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.”
- 10 These chapter divisions are arbitrary since there is an overlapping of generations in the narratives as there always is in human history. Technically, the “generations of Jacob” begins at 37:2, but Jacob’s story starts much earlier and moves Isaac into the background. There is no section labeled “the generations of Joseph” since Joseph is a part of the Jacob narrative which closes the book of Genesis.
- 11 See Morgan’s *The Analyzed Bible and Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, published by Fleming H. Revell.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Genesis 1

# WHEN GOD SPEAKS, SOMETHING HAPPENS

Some people call the president of the United States “the most powerful leader in the world,” but more than one former president would disagree. Ex-presidents have confessed that their executive orders weren’t always obeyed and that there wasn’t much they could do about it.

For example, during President Nixon’s first term in office, he ordered the removal of some ugly temporary buildings on the mall, eyesores that had been there since the World War I era, but it took many months before the order was obeyed. When journalists began writing about “the imperial presidency,” Nixon called the whole idea “ludicrous.”<sup>1</sup> Presidents may speak and sign official orders, but that’s no guarantee that anything will happen.

However, when God speaks, something happens! “For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9 nkjv). When you consider the acts of God recorded in

Genesis 1, you can’t help but bow in reverent worship, for His creative acts reveal a God of power and wisdom whose word carries authority.

### God creates (1:1–2)

Three books of the Bible open with “beginnings”: Gen. 1:1; Mark 1:1; and John 1:1. Each of these beginnings is important. “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1) takes us into eternity past when Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, existed as the eternal Son of God. John wasn’t suggesting that Jesus had a beginning. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who existed before all things because He made all things (John 1:3; Col. 1:16–17; Heb. 1:2). Therefore, John’s “beginning” antedates Genesis 1:1.<sup>2</sup>

The gospel of Mark opens with, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” The message of the gospel didn’t start with the ministry of John the Baptist, because the good news of God’s grace was announced in Genesis 3:15. As Hebrews 11 bears witness, God’s promise was believed by people throughout Old Testament history, and those who believed were saved. (See Gal. 3:1–9 and Rom. 4.) The ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, was the beginning of the proclamation of the message concerning Jesus Christ of Nazareth (see Acts 1:21–22 and 10:37).

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1) refers to the dateless past when God brought the universe into existence out of nothing (Ps. 33:6; Rom. 4:17; Heb. 1:3).<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:1–2 is the declaration that God created the universe; the detailed explanation of the six days of God’s creative work is given in the rest of the chapter.

Thirty-two times in this chapter, this creative God is called Elohim, a Hebrew word that emphasizes His majesty and power. (The covenant name “Jehovah” appears for the first time in Gen. 2:4.) Elohim is a plural noun that is consistently used in connection with singular verbs and adjectives. (Hebrew tenses are singular, dual, or plural.) Some think that this plural form is what grammarians call the “plural of majesty,” or it might also be a hint that God exists in three persons. In Scripture, Creation is attributed to the Father (Acts 4:24) and to the Son (John 1:1–3) and to the Holy Spirit (Ps. 104:30).

Elohim reveals His power by creating everything by merely speaking the word. Matter is not eternal; it began when God spoke everything into existence (Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16; Rev. 4:11; 5:13). Scripture doesn’t reveal why God chose to start His creative work with a chaotic mass that was dark, formless, and empty,<sup>4</sup> but the Holy Spirit, brooding over the waters,<sup>5</sup> would bring order out of chaos and beauty and fullness out of emptiness.<sup>6</sup> He can still do that today with the lives of all who will yield to Him.

The nations that surrounded the people of Israel had ancient traditions that “explained” the origin of the universe and humankind. These myths involved mon-

sters that battled in deep oceans and gods who fought battles to bring the universe into being. But the simple account in Genesis presents us with one God who alone created all things and is still in control of His creation. Had the Jewish people paid close attention to what Moses wrote, they would never have worshipped the idols of their pagan neighbors.

### God forms (1:3–13)

There's a pattern to God's activities during the creation week: first He formed and then He filled. He made three spheres of activity: the heavens, the landmasses, and the waters; and then He filled them with appropriate forms of life.

Day one (vv. 3–5)—God commanded the light to shine and then separated the light from the darkness. But how could there be light when the light-bearers aren't mentioned until the fourth day (vv. 14–19)? Since we aren't told that this light came from any of the luminaries God created, it probably came from God Himself who is light (John 1:5) and wears light as a garment (Ps. 104:2; Hab. 3:3–4). The eternal city will enjoy endless light without the help of the sun or moon (Rev. 22:5), so why couldn't there be light at the beginning of time before the luminaries were made?<sup>7</sup>

Life as we know it could not exist without the light of the sun. Paul saw in this creative act the work of God in the new creation, the salvation of the lost. "For it is the God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6 *nkjv*). "In him [Jesus] was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4).

In Scripture, light is associated with Christ (8:12), the Word of God (Ps. 119:105, 130), God's people (Matt. 5:14–16; Eph. 5:8), and God's blessing (Prov. 4:18), while darkness is associated with Satan (Luke 23:53; Eph. 6:12), sin (Matt. 6:22–23; John 3:19–21), death (Job 3:4–6, 9), spiritual ignorance (John 1:5), and divine judgment (Matt. 8:12). This explains why God separated the light from the darkness, for the two have nothing in common. God's people are to "walk in the light" (1 John 1:5–10), for "what communion has light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14–16; Eph. 5:1–14).

From the very first day of creation, God established the principle of separation. Not only did He separate the light from the darkness (Gen. 1:4) and the day from the night (v. 14), but later He also separated the waters above from the waters beneath (vv. 6–8), and the land from the waters (vv. 9–10). Through Moses, God commanded the people of Israel to remain separated from the nations around them (Ex. 34:10–17; Deut. 7:1–11), and when they violated this commandment, they suffered. God's people today need to be careful in their walk (Ps. 1:1) and not be defiled by the world (Rom. 12:1–2; James 1:7; 4:4; 1 John 2:15–17).

Since God is the Creator, He has the right to call

things whatever He pleases, and thus we have "day" and "night." The word "day" can refer to the portion of time when the sun is visible as well as to the whole period of twenty-four hours composed of "evening and morning" (Gen. 1:5).<sup>8</sup> Sometimes biblical writers used "day" to describe a longer period of time in which God accomplishes some special purpose, such as "the day of the Lord" (Isa. 2:12) or "the day of judgment" (Matt. 10:15).

When we speak about spiritual things, it's important that we use God's dictionary as well as His vocabulary. Words carry meanings and giving the wrong meaning to a word could lead to serious trouble. It would be fatal to a patient if a physician confused "arsenic" with "aspirin," so medical people are very careful to use accurate terminology. The "Christian vocabulary" is even more important because eternal death could be the consequence of confusion. The Bible explains and illustrates words like sin, grace, forgiveness, justification, and faith, and to change their meanings is to replace God's truth with lies. "Woe to them who call evil, good, and good, evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (Isa. 5:20).

Day two (vv. 6–8)—God put an expanse between the upper waters and the lower waters and made "heaven," what we know as "the sky." It seems that these waters were a vaporous "blanket" that covered the original creative mass. When separated from the landmass, the lower waters eventually became the ocean and the seas, and the upper waters played a part in the flood during Noah's day (Gen. 7:11–12; 9:11–15).

The word translated "firmament" (expanse) means "to beat out." In Scripture, the sky is sometimes referred to as a dome or a covering; however, Scripture nowhere supports the pagan mythological notion that the sky is some kind of solid covering. The luminaries were set in this expanse (1:14–17) and that's where the fowl flew (v. 20).

Day three (vv. 9–10)—God gathered the waters and caused the dry land to appear, thus making "earth" and "seas." Israel's pagan neighbors believed all kinds of myths about the heavens, the earth, and the seas; but Moses made it clear that Elohim, the one true God, was Lord of them all. For the first time, God said that what He had done was "good" (v. 10). God's creation is still good, even though it travails because of sin (Rom. 8:20–22) and has been ravaged and exploited by sinful people.

God also caused plant life to appear on the earth: the grasses, the seed-producing herbs, and the fruit-bearing trees. God decreed that each would reproduce "after its kind," which helps to make possible order in nature. God has set reproductive limits for both plants and animals (Gen. 1:21) because He is the Lord of Creation. There's no suggestion here of any kind of "evolution." God was preparing the earth for a habitation for humans and for animals, and the plants would

## Genesis 1

help to provide their food. A second time, God said that His work was good (v. 12).

### God fills (1:14–27; 2:7)

God has now created three special “spaces”: the land, the seas, and the expanse of the sky. During the next three creative days, He will fill these spaces.

Day four (vv. 14–19). In the expanse of the sky God placed the heavenly bodies and assigned them their work: to divide the day and night and to provide “signs” to mark off days, years, and seasons. Light had already appeared on the first day, but now it was concentrated in these heavenly bodies.

Because of their religious observances, the Jews needed to know the times and the seasons, when the Sabbath arrived and ended, when it was a new month, and when it was time to celebrate their annual feasts (Lev. 26). Before the invention of the clock and the compass, the activities of human life were closely linked to nature’s cycles, and navigators depended on the stars to direct them. Israel would need the help of the heavenly bodies to direct their activities, and God would occasionally use signs in the heavens to speak to His people on earth.<sup>9</sup>

Israel was commanded not to imitate their pagan neighbors by worshipping the heavenly bodies (Ex. 20:1–6; Deut. 4:15–19; 17:2–7). They were to worship the true God who created the “heavenly host,” the army of heaven that did His bidding. However, the Jews didn’t obey God’s commandment (Jer. 8:2; 19:13; Ezek. 8:16; Zeph. 1:4–6) and suffered greatly for their sins.

The ancient peoples were fascinated by the moon and stars and the movements of the sun and planets, and it was but a short step from admiration to worship. “If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson, “how would men believe and adore, and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown ...”<sup>10</sup>

Day five (vv. 20–21). God had created the sky and the waters, and now He filled them abundantly with living creatures. He made birds to fly in the sky and aquatic creatures to frolic in the seas. “O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions—This great and wide sea, in which are innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great” (Ps. 104:24–25 nkjv).

A new element is added to God’s work on this day: He not only called His work “good,” but He blessed the creatures He had made. This is the first time the word “bless” is used in the Bible. God’s blessing enabled the creatures and the fowl to reproduce abundantly and enjoy all that He had made for them. God would also bless the first man and woman (Gen. 1:28; 5:2), the Sabbath day (2:3), and Noah and his family (9:2). After creation, perhaps the most important occasion for God’s blessing was when He gave His gracious

covenant to Abraham and his descendants (12:1–3). That blessing has reached down to God’s people today (Gal. 3:1–9).

Day six (vv. 24–31; 2:7). God had formed the sky and filled it with heavenly luminaries and flying birds. He had formed the seas and filled the waters with various aquatic creatures. Creation reaches its climax when on the sixth day He filled the land with animal life and then created the first man who, with his wife, would have dominion over the earth and its creatures.

Like the first man, the animals were formed out of the dust of the ground (2:7), which explains why the bodies of both humans and animals go back to the dust after death (Eccl. 3:19–20). However, humans and animals are different. No matter how intelligent some animals may appear to be, or how much they are taught, animals are not endowed with the “image of God” as are humans.<sup>11</sup>

The creation of the first man is seen as a very special occasion, for there’s a “consultation” prior to the event. “Let us make man in our image” sounds like the conclusion of a divine deliberation among the persons of the Godhead.<sup>12</sup> God couldn’t have been talking with the angels about His plans because angels weren’t made in God’s image (“Our image”), and angels had nothing to do with the creation of Adam.

“And the Lord formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). The verb “formed” suggests the potter making a work of art in his skilled hands. The human body is indeed a work of art, an amazingly complex organism that only the wisdom of God could design and the power of God create.

The physical matter for Adam’s body came from the ground, for the name “Adam” means “taken out of the ground,” but the life Adam possessed came from God. Of course, God is spirit and doesn’t have lungs for breathing. This statement is what theologians call an “anthropomorphism,” the using of a human characteristic to explain a divine work or attribute.<sup>13</sup>

Several important facts must be noted about the origin of humans. First, we were created by God. We are not the products of some galactic accident nor are we the occupants of the top rung of an evolutionary ladder. God made us, which means we are creatures and wholly dependent on Him. “For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Luke 3:38 calls Adam “the son of God.”

Second, we were created in God’s image (Gen. 2:26–27). Unlike the angels and the animals, humans can have a very special relationship with God. He not only gave us personality—minds to think with, emotions to feel with, and wills for making decisions—but He also gave us an inner spiritual nature that enables us to know Him and worship Him. The image of God in men and women has been marred by sin



(Eph. 4:18–19), but through faith in Christ and submission to the work of the Holy Spirit, believers can have the divine nature renewed within them (2 Peter 1:4; Eph. 4:20–24; Col. 3:9–10; Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). One day when we see Jesus, all of God’s children will share in the glorious image of Christ (1 John 3:1–3; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49).

Third, we were created to have dominion over the earth (Gen. 2:26, 28).<sup>14</sup> Adam and Eve were the first regents over God’s creation (Ps. 8:6–8). “The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord’s; but the earth He has given to the children of men” (Ps. 115:16 nkjv). But when Adam believed Satan’s lie and ate of the forbidden fruit, he lost his kingship, and now sin and death reign over the earth (Rom. 5:12–21).

When Jesus Christ, the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), came to earth, He exercised the dominion that the first Adam had lost. He demonstrated that He had authority over the fish (Luke 5:1–7; John 21:1–6; Matt. 17:24–27), the fowl (26:69–75), and the animals (Mark 1:13; 11:3–7). When He died on the cross, He conquered sin and death, so that now grace can reign (Rom. 5:21) and God’s people can “reign in life” through Jesus Christ (v. 17). One day, when He returns, Jesus will restore to His own the dominion that was lost because of Adam (Heb. 2:5ff.).

Both Adam and the animal creation were vegetarians until after the flood (Gen. 1:29–30; 9:1–4). Isaiah 11:7 indicates that the carnivorous beasts will return to this diet when Jesus Christ returns and establishes His kingdom on earth.

Fourth, this wonderful Creator deserves our worship, praise, and obedience. When God surveyed His creation, He saw that it was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Contrary to what some religions and philosophies teach, creation is not evil and it isn’t a sin to enjoy the good gifts God shares with us (1 Tim. 6:17). David surveyed God’s creation and asked, “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” (Ps. 8:4 nkjv). The earth is but a tiny planet orbiting in a vast galaxy, and yet “the earth is the Lord’s” (24:1). It’s the one planet He has chosen to visit and to redeem!

The heavenly creatures before God’s throne praise Him for His creation, and so should we. “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11). When we bow at meals to thank Him for the food He provides, when we see the sunshine and the rain provided at no expense to us, and when we watch the progress of the seasons, we should lift our hearts to praise the Creator for His faithfulness and generosity.

Finally, we must be good stewards of creation. This means we should respect our fellow human beings who are also made in the image of God (Gen. 9:6). It means appreciating the gifts we have in creation and not wasting or exploiting them. We’ll look into these matters in greater detail in further studies,

but it’s worth noting that we can’t honor the God of creation if we dishonor His creation. We must accept creation as a gift, guard it as a precious treasure, and invest it for the glory of God. Isaac Watts said it beautifully:

I sing the goodness of the Lord,  
that filled the earth with food;  
He formed the creatures with His word,  
and then pronounced them good.  
Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed,  
where e’er I turn my eye;  
If I survey the ground I tread,  
or gaze upon the sky.

“The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works” (Ps. 145:9).

### Notes

- 1 See *In the Archaic* by Richard M. Nixon (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 206.
- 2 John describes seven days in the life of Jesus (John 1:19–28, 29–34, 35–42, 43–51; 2:1), obviously a parallel to Genesis 1. Moses wrote of the old creation but John of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).
- 3 The Hebrew word *bara* means “to initiate something new, to bring into existence.” It’s used in the Creation account to describe the creation of sea creatures and fowl (Gen. 1:21), the creation of man and woman (v. 27), and the whole work of creation (1; 2:3–4).
- 4 The “gap theory,” stated in G.H. Pember’s book, *Earth’s Earliest Ages*, and popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible, affirms that the original creation of Genesis 1:1 was judged when Satan fell, and that verses 3ff. describe a remaking of the ruined creation. Verse 2 should read, “And the earth became without form and void.” Hence, there was a “gap” of unknown duration between the first two verses of Genesis. But why would God ruin the whole creation just because of Satan’s rebellion? And if He created it instantly, why would He take six days to restore it? There are capable defenders of both views, and they all claim that the Hebrew text is on their side. To me, it appears that verses 3ff. are describing God’s original acts of creation and that we don’t have to put a “gap” between verse 1 and verse 2 in order to solve any problems.
- 5 The image in verse 2 is that of the eagle hovering over its young (Deut. 32:11). In both the Hebrew (*ruah*) and the Greek (*pneuma*), the word for “Spirit” also means “wind” (see John 3:8), so the verse could be translated “and God’s wind swept across the waters.” However, “Spirit” seems to be the logical translation.
- 6 “Without form and void” is the Hebrew phrase *tohu wabohu*, which describes utter waste, vanity, and ruin. Jeremiah borrowed the image to describe God’s judgment of the land of Judah (Jer. 4:23), and Isaiah used it to describe the ruin of Edom (Isa. 34:11).
- 7 Some commentators believe that God’s work on the fourth day was not to create the luminaries but to assign them their tasks. However, the description in Genesis 1:14–19

- parallels that of the other five days and gives every evidence of explaining the creative act of God.
- 8 When speaking of a twenty-four hour day, the Jewish people said “evening and morning” rather than “morning and evening,” because their days started with sunset, not sunrise. Thus, sunset on Thursday evening ushered in Friday, and sunset on Friday ushered in the Sabbath day.
  - 9 People who depend on their astrological charts for guidance are following ancient pagan customs that are useless. There’s no evidence that the position of the heavenly bodies has any influence on human life on earth. The Bible condemns all human attempts to foresee or control the future (Deut. 18:10–13; Isa. 47:13; Jer. 10:2). The statement that the sun and moon “rule over” the day and night respectively doesn’t mean that they exert special influence on the affairs of people but that day and night are their spheres of operation. According to the rotation of the earth, its orbit around the sun, and the moon’s orbit around the earth, the sun and moon govern how much light there will be on earth.
  - 10 Ralph Waldo Emerson. *Nature* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 9–10.
  - 11 Even though many animals are stronger than we are and live longer than we do, God has given humans dominion over the animals. However, this doesn’t mean we can abuse animal life and do whatever we please with God’s creatures (Jer. 27:5). While animals have been given to serve us, we must treat them as creatures made by God. “A righteous man regards the life of his animal” (Prov. 12:10 nkjv). “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain” (Deut. 25:4 niv). God takes care of the animals (Ps. 36:6; 104:10–18; Matt. 6:26) and knows when they suffer (Joel 1:18–20; 2:22; Jonah 4:11). Even the way we treat helpless birds is a concern to God (Deut. 22:6–7). Those who abuse and exploit God’s creation will one day be judged (Rev. 11:18).
  - 12 You have a similar “dialogue” recorded in Genesis 3:22; 11:7, and see Isaiah 6:8.
  - 13 As we have seen, the Hebrew word *ruah* means “breath” and “spirit” (or Spirit). The breath of God brought life to Adam just as the Spirit of God brings eternal life to the sinner who believes on Christ (John 3:7–8; 20:22).
  - 14 Dominion over the earth and its creatures may have been the privilege Lucifer wanted when he rebelled against God and led some of the angels in revolt against the Lord. Isaiah 14:12–17 speaks primarily about the fall of the king of Babylon, but behind this mysterious passage lurks the image of “the son of the morning,” the angel who wanted to be as God and promised to make Eve like God (Gen. 3:5).

CHAPTER THREE  
**Genesis 2**  
**FIRST THINGS FIRST**

If you could have been present to witness any event in Bible history, which event would you choose? I once asked that question of several well-known Christian leaders, and the answers were varied: the crucifixion of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the flood,

Israel crossing the Red Sea, and even David slaying Goliath. But one of them said, “I would like to have been present when God finished His creation. It must have been an awesome sight!”

Some scientists claim that if we could travel out into space fast enough and far enough, we could “catch up” with the light beams from the past and watch history unfold before our eyes. Perhaps the Lord will let us do that when we get to heaven. I hope so, because I would like to see the extraordinary events Moses described in Genesis 1 and 2.

Genesis 2 introduces us to a series of “firsts” that are important to us if we want to build our lives according to the basics God has put into His universe.

**The first Sabbath (2:1–3)**

The word “Sabbath” isn’t found in this paragraph, but Moses is writing about the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. The phrase “seventh day” is mentioned three times in verses 2–3. “Sabbath” comes from a Hebrew word *shabbat* that means “to cease working, to rest” and is related to the Hebrew word for “seven.”<sup>1</sup> We need to consider three different Sabbaths found in the Bible.

The personal Sabbath of the Lord God (vv. 1–4) His first Sabbath didn’t take place because God was tired from all His creative work, because God doesn’t get weary (Isa. 40:28). God set apart the seventh day because His work of creation was finished and He was pleased and satisfied with what He had created. “And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

Three things are distinctive about this seventh day of the creation week. First, there’s no mention of “evening and morning,” suggesting that God’s Sabbath rest would have no end. Unfortunately, man’s sin interrupted God’s rest, and God had to search for Adam and Eve and deal with them (3:8–9, and see John 5:9, 17). Second, there’s no record that He blessed any of the other six days, but God did bless the seventh day (Gen. 2:3). In blessing it, He made it a blessing. Third, after blessing the seventh day, God sanctified it (v. 3), which means He set it apart for His own special purposes.<sup>2</sup>

Jehovah is the God of time as well as the Lord of eternity. It was He who created time and established the rotation of the planets and their orbits around the sun. It was He who marked out the seven-day week and set aside one day for Himself. Every living thing that God has created lives a day at a time except humans made in God’s image! People rush around in the frantic “rat race” of life, always planning to rest but never seeming to fulfill their plan.

It has been said that most people in our world are being “crucified between two thieves”: the regrets of yesterday and the worries about tomorrow. That’s why they can’t enjoy today. Relying on modern means of transportation and communication, we try to live two or three days at a time, only to run headlong against

the creation cycle of the universe, and the results are painful and often disastrous.

A famous Chinese scholar came to America to lecture and during the course of his tour was met at a busy metropolitan railway station by his university host. "If we run quickly, we can catch the next train and save ourselves three minutes," said the host. The scholar quietly asked, "And what significant thing shall we do with the three minutes that we save by running?" A good question that could not be answered. Henry David Thoreau wrote in *Walden* over a century ago, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." I wonder what he'd say if he saw the frantic people running up and down escalators in our airline terminals!

God had done many wonderful things during the six days of creation, but the climax of the creation week was God's "rest" after His work. As we shall see, God has sanctified work as well as rest, but it's rest that seems to be the greatest need in people's hearts today. Augustine was correct when he wrote, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

The national Sabbath of Israel's no mention of the Sabbath in Scripture until Exodus 16:23 when God gave the regulations to Israel about gathering the daily manna. From the way this commandment is worded, it suggests that the Jews already knew the importance of the Sabbath and were observing it as a day of rest. In giving the Sabbath to Israel, the Lord related this special day to other events in sacred history.

To begin with, when God gave Israel the law at Mount Sinai, the Sabbath was connected with creation (20:8–11). God was the generous Giver of all that they needed, and they must acknowledge Him by worshipping the Creator and not the creation. They were not to imitate the pagan nations around them (Rom. 1:18ff.). Moses even mentioned the weekly rest needed by servants and farm animals (Ex. 23:12), so keeping the Sabbath was a humanitarian act as well as a religious duty. The Lord commanded His people to observe every seventh year as a Sabbatical Year and every fiftieth year as a Year of Jubilee. This would permit the land to enjoy its Sabbaths and be renewed (Lev. 25).

The Sabbath was not only connected with creation, but at the close of the giving of the law, it was vested with special significance as a sign between Israel and Jehovah (Ex. 31:12–17; Neh. 9:13–15). "Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you" (Ex. 31:13 nkjv). There's no evidence that God ever required any other nation to observe the Sabbath, because the Jews alone were the chosen people of God.

There's a third connection between the Sabbath and the Jews. When Moses rehearsed the law for the new generation about to enter Canaan, he connected the Sabbath Day with their deliverance from Egypt (Deut. 5:12–15). The weekly Sabbath and the annual

Passover feast would both remind Israel of God's mercy and power in freeing the nation from bondage. Furthermore, this weekly day of rest would also be a foretaste of the rest they would enjoy in the Promised Land (Deut. 3:20; 12:10; 25:19; Josh. 22:4). God had brought them out of Egypt that He might bring them into the Promised Land to claim their inheritance (Deut. 4:37–38). In the book of Hebrews, this concept of a "promised rest" is applied to believers today.

The nation of Israel eventually declined spiritually and didn't observe God's laws, including the Sabbath law, and they were ultimately punished for their disobedience (2 Chron. 36:14–21; Ezek. 20:1ff.; Isa. 58:13–14; Jer. 17:19–27). The northern kingdom of Israel was swallowed up by Assyria, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah was taken into captivity by Babylon.

By the time of the ministry of Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees had added their traditions to God's Word and turned the law in general and the Sabbath in particular into religious bondage. The few prohibitions found in Moses (Ex. 16:29; 35:2–3; Num. 15:32–36) were expanded into numerous regulations. Jesus, however, rejected their traditions and even performed miracles on the Sabbath! He said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

The spiritual Sabbath of the Christian believer (Heb. 4:1–11) Hebrews 4 brings together God's creation rest (v. 4) and Israel's Canaan rest (v. 8) to teach us about the spiritual rest that believers have in Christ (vv. 9–11). When you trust Jesus Christ, you enter the "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17) and into His spiritual rest (Matt. 11:28–30). You also enter into the spiritual inheritance He gives all who trust Him (Acts 20:32; Eph. 1:18; Col. 1:12). Believers are not under bondage to keep the law (Gal. 5:1) because the Holy Spirit fulfills the righteousness of the law in us as we yield to Him (Rom. 8:1–3).

The first Christian believers met daily for worship and fellowship (Acts 2:46), but they also gathered together on the first day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection from the dead (John 20:19, 26; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). The first day was known as "the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10); and to make the Lord's Day into a "Christian Sabbath" is to confuse what these two days stand for in God's plan of salvation.

The seventh day of the week, the Jewish Sabbath, symbolizes the old creation and the covenant of law: first you work, then you rest. The first day of the week, the Lord's day, symbolizes the new creation and the covenant of grace: first you believe in Christ and find rest, and then you work (Eph. 2:8–10). In the new creation, God's Spirit enables us to make the entire week an experience of worship, praise, and service to the glory of God.

The Jewish Sabbath law was fulfilled by Christ on the cross and is no longer binding on God's people (Gal. 4:1–11; Col. 2:16–17). However, some believers