

The Creation of the World

1 In the ^abeginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was ^bwithout form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he

called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶And God said, ^d“Let there be an expanse¹ in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷And God made² the expanse and ^eseparated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were ^fabove the expanse. And it was so. ⁸And God called the expanse Heaven. ³ And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, ^g“Let the waters under the

¹Or a canopy; also verses 7, 8, 14, 15, 17, 20 ²Or fashioned; also verse 16 ³Or Sky; also verses 9, 14, 15, 17, 20, 26, 28, 30; 2:1

1:1–11:26 Primeval History. Genesis 1–11 surveys the history of the world before Abraham, while chs. 12–50 focus on one main family. There are no real parallels to chs. 12–50 in the literature of other ancient civilizations. However, other ancient stories do exist about both creation and the flood. These stories stand in sharp contrast to the biblical account. Generally they depict creation as a great struggle, often involving conflict between the gods. For example, they claim that the flood was sent because the gods could not stand the noise made by human beings but were unable to control it in any other way. Genesis disproves such stories by its teachings. There is only one God, whose word is almighty. He spoke the world into being. The sun and moon are not gods in their own right but are created by the one God. It is human sin that prompts the flood. These principles in Genesis 1–11 run through the rest of Scripture.

1:1–2:3 God's Creation and Ordering of Heaven and Earth. The book of Genesis opens with a majestic description of how God created the heavens and earth and then put everything in order so that it might become his dwelling place. God assigns humanity to govern the other creatures on his behalf, so that the whole earth should become the temple of God, the place of his presence, displaying his glory.

1:1 In the beginning. The opening verse of the Genesis creation account can be taken as either (1) a *summary* of the entire process of creation or (2) a description of the *first event* in creation. This event would have occurred sometime before the first day (vv. 3–5), and would have included the creation of matter, space, and time. This second view emphasizes the fact that God created the universe from nothing (compare Heb. 11:3). **God created.** The Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, is plural, possibly to express God's majesty, but the verb “created” is singular, indicating that God is one being. In contrast to other ancient Near Eastern accounts of creation, Genesis always emphasizes that there is only one God. Whenever the Hebrew verb for “create” occurs in the OT, God is the subject. **Heavens and the earth** here means “everything.” Thus, “in the beginning” refers to the beginning of everything. The text indicates that God created everything in the universe, which means that he created it out of nothing.

1:2 Before the first actual day of creation (vv. 3–5), the **earth** was **without form and void** (compare Jer. 4:23), implying that it lacked order and content. The reference to **darkness . . . over the face of the deep** points to the absence of light. **The Spirit of God was hovering**

DID YOU KNOW?

In the beginning. The book of Genesis gets its name from the Latin phrase *en te genesei*, or “In the beginning,” which are the opening words of the Bible.

suggests that something was about to happen. There is no reason to think that a long time elapsed between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2.

1:3–5 And God said. God's absolute power is seen in that he merely speaks and things are created. Each new section of ch. 1 is introduced by God's speaking. Everything that God speaks into being is **good** (vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). These verses show how God has arranged time in a weekly cycle (**Day . . . Night**). God is pictured as working for six days and resting on the seventh, which is a model for human activity. Day 4 will develop this idea further: the lights are placed in the heavens for signs and seasons, for marking days and years and the times of the festivals, such as Passover. This sense of time having a structure is further emphasized as each stage of God's creative work is separated into specific days. **there was evening and there was morning, the first day.** After each workday there is an evening and then a morning, implying that there is a nighttime (the worker's daily time of rest) in between. Similar phrases divide ch. 1 into six distinctive workdays, with 2:1–3 being a seventh day, God's Sabbath. On the first three days God creates the environment that the creatures of days 4–6 will inhabit. For example, the sea and sky (day 2) are occupied by the fish and birds (day 5). These days can be understood as days in the life of God, but how his days relate to human days is more difficult to determine (see 2 Pet. 3:8).

1:6–8 As light was separated from darkness, so the **waters** are separated to form an **expanse**, which God calls **Heaven**. It is difficult to find a single English word that accurately translates the precise meaning of this Hebrew term (see ESV footnote). In this context, it refers to what humans see above them, that is, the region that contains both heavenly lights (vv. 14–17) and birds (v. 20).

1:9–13 God organizes two further regions: the **dry land**, forming **Earth**; and the **waters**, forming **Seas** (vv. 9–10). God then instructs

CROSS-REFERENCES:

CHAPTER 1 ¹Job 38:4–7; Ps. 33:6; 136:5; Isa. 42:5; 45:18; John 1:3; Acts 14:15; 17:24; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:10; 11:3; Rev. 4:11 ²Jer. 4:23 ³2 Cor. 4:6 ⁶Job 37:18; Ps. 136:5; Jer. 10:12; 51:15 ⁷Prov. 8:27–29 ⁹Ps. 148:4 ⁹Job 38:8–11; Ps. 33:7; 136:6; Jer. 5:22; 2 Pet. 3:5

heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth,¹ and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ And God said, ^{11a}“Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants² yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for ^{14a}signs and for ^{14b}seasons,³ and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ And God ^{16a}made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to ^{18a}rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds⁴ fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” ²¹ So ^{21a}God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² And God blessed them, saying, ^{22a}“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. ²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, ^{26a}“Let us make man⁵ in our image, ^{26b}after our likeness. And ^{26c}let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; ^{27a}male and female he created them.

¹ Or *Land*; also verses 11, 12, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30; 2:1 ² Or *small plants*; also verses 12, 29 ³ Or *appointed times* ⁴ Or *flying things*; see Leviticus 11:19–20 ⁵ The Hebrew word for *man* (*adam*) is the generic term for mankind and becomes the proper name *Adam*

DID YOU KNOW?

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God said, “Let us make man” (1:26). This phrase could be the Bible’s earliest indication that God exists as three persons in one: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christians refer to this as the doctrine of the Trinity.

the earth to bring forth **vegetation** (vv. 11–12). The creation of distinctive locations in days 1–3, along with vegetation, prepares for the filling of these locations in days 4–6.

1:14–19 These verses, describing the fourth day, correspond with the separating of light and darkness on the first day (vv. 3–5). Here is the creation of **lights** that will govern time, as well as provide **light upon the earth** (v. 15). By referring to them as the **greater light** and **lesser light** (v. 16), the author of Genesis avoids using terms that were also proper names for pagan gods linked to the sun and the moon. The term **made** may simply mean that God “fashioned” or “worked on” these greater and lesser lights. It does not necessarily mean that they did not exist in any form before this. On this day God made it possible that the sun and moon would define the passing of time. The references to **seasons** (v. 14) or “appointed times” (esv footnote) and to **days and years** probably refer to appointed times for religious observances in the Hebrew calendar (see Ex. 13:10).

1:16 and the stars. The immense universe that God created (see note on Isa. 40:25–26) is mentioned here only briefly, almost as an afterthought. The focus of Genesis 1 is on the earth.

1:20–23 This section, on day 5, describes how the **waters** and the **expanse of the heavens** are filled with various kinds of creatures.

1:21 The Hebrew term for **great sea creatures** can mean large ser-

pents, dragons, or crocodiles, as well as whales or sharks. Some have suggested that this could also refer to extinct creatures such as dinosaurs.

1:24–25 livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth. These terms group the land-dwelling animals into three broad categories, probably reflecting the way nomadic shepherds would experience them. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and it is hard to know in which category to put some animals.

1:26 Let us make man in our image. Some have suggested that God may be addressing the members of his heavenly court, whom the OT elsewhere calls “sons of God” (e.g., Job 1:6) and the NT calls “angels.” But man is not made in the image of angels (see Gen. 1:27), and the Bible never teaches that angels participated in the creation of human beings. Since God alone creates man (v. 27), many Christians believe that “let us” means God is speaking to himself. If so, this would be the first biblical mention of the “Trinity” (see note on John 1:1).

1:27 The term image of God can be seen as describing the ways in which man is different from all other created beings. It describes how humans resemble God in their ability to think, to communicate, to understand right and wrong, to be creative, and to experience relationships with God and with one another. This allows men and women to represent God as they exercise authority over the rest of creation (see v. 26; and note on v. 28). The Hebrew word for **man** (*adam*), is often a generic term for both male and female, though sometimes it refers to man in distinction from woman (e.g., 2:22, 23; 3:8). It can also be the proper name “Adam” (2:20; 3:17; 4:1; 5:1).

¹¹ Ps. 104:14 ¹⁴ Jer. 10:2; Ezek. 32:7, 8; Joel 2:30, 31; 3:15; Matt. 24:29; Luke 21:25 ¹⁵ Ps. 104:19 ¹⁶ Deut. 4:19; Ps. 136:7–9 ¹⁸ Jer. 31:35 ²¹ Ps. 104:25, 26 ²² ch. 8:17; 9:1 ²⁶ ch. 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8 ²⁷ ch. 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; James 3:9 ²⁸ ch. 9:2; Ps. 8:6–8; James 3:7 ²⁷ ch. 2:18, 21–23; 5:2; Mal. 2:15; Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6

²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, ²⁹“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ³⁰And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. ³¹“You shall have them for food. ³²And ³³to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³⁴“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The Seventh Day, God Rests

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and ³all the host of them. ⁴And ⁵on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done,

¹Or open country ²Or earth; also verse 6 ³Or spring

and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

The Creation of Man and Woman

⁴ ⁵These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

⁵When no ⁶bush of the field¹ was yet in the land² and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man ³to work the ground, ⁴and a mist³ was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— ⁷then the LORD God formed the man of ⁸dust from the ground and ⁹breathed into his ¹⁰nostrils the breath of life, and ¹¹the man became a living creature. ¹²And the LORD God planted a

1:28–30 Although the word “covenant” does not occur in the Bible until 6:18, many consider 1:28–30 along with 2:16–17 to be God’s covenant with Adam. See Hos. 6:7 and note. Adam receives this covenant on behalf of the rest of mankind. Thus, in the NT, Paul views Adam as a representative head of the human race (1 Cor. 15:22).

1:28 Be fruitful and multiply. From the time of creation, God’s plan has been that the whole earth should be populated by those who know him and who serve wisely as his representatives. To **subdue** the earth and to **have dominion** over it probably means that humans are permitted to make the earth beneficial for themselves. They are to investigate and develop its resources. This command provides a basis for wise scientific and technological development. It does not mean that humans may exploit the earth and its creatures simply to satisfy their own greed.

1:31 One final occurrence of **behold**, it was **very good** invites the reader to imagine seeing creation through God’s eyes. Despite the invasion of sin (ch. 3), the material creation retains its basic goodness (see 1 Tim. 4:4).

2:1–3 God has now completed the process of putting his creation in order (see note on 1:1–2:3). That God **rested** does not imply he was weary from labor. Rather, God’s resting hints at the purpose of creation. God’s purpose for the earth is that it should become his dwelling place, not simply a place for his creatures. **God blessed the seventh day and made it holy** (2:3). These words provide the basis for God’s instructing the Israelites to rest from their normal labor on the Sabbath day (see Ex. 20:8–11).

2:4–4:26 Earth’s First People. Centered initially on the garden of Eden, the episodes in this part of Genesis recount how God’s ordered creation is thrown into chaos by the human couple’s disobedience. The subsequent story of Cain and Abel and then Lamech (ch. 4) shows human society spiraling downward into violence. These events are essential for understanding not only the rest of Genesis but the rest of the Bible as well.

2:4 These are the generations of. This is the first of 11 such headings in Genesis (5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2). **LORD God.** Throughout 1:1–2:3 the generic word “God” was used for the Creator. The reader is now introduced to God’s personal name, “Yahweh,” which is rendered in most English Bible translations as “LORD,” using small capital letters. This practice comes from the ancient Jewish tradition of substituting for “Yahweh” the Hebrew term for “LORD” when reading the biblical text. The Septuagint (an ancient

PROFILE: ADAM

Adam, whose name means “man,” was the first human being. Created out of dust, he was made in the image of God. Adam was given dominion over the rest of creation and was placed in the garden of Eden to care for it. God created Eve as a helper for Adam, and together they enjoyed perfect fellowship with their Creator. But Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, which brought sin and death into the world. Because of their sin, all humans are now born sinners and will someday die. The Bible tells the story of how God redeems his creation from the curse of Adam’s sin. “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22).

KEY REFERENCE: GENESIS 2:7

Greek translation of the OT) used the Greek word for “LORD” (*Kyrios*) to refer to God. That translation was then quoted many times by the NT authors, who also used *Kyrios* rather than Yahweh for God’s name. See notes on Ex. 3:14; 3:15.

2:7 then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground. The verb “formed” describes a potter fashioning clay into a particular shape. The close relationship between the man and the ground is reflected in the Hebrew words *’adam* for man and *’adamah* for the ground. **living creature.** The same Hebrew term is used in 1:20, 24 for sea and land creatures. (See Paul’s quotation of this passage in 1 Cor. 15:45.)

2:8–9 God provides a suitable environment for the man by planting a **garden in Eden, in the east.** The name “Eden” suggests luxury and pleasure. It probably refers to a region much greater than the garden itself. God formed the man in the “land” (see vv. 5–7), and then **put** him in the garden (compare v. 15). The earliest translation

28 ch. 9:1, 7 **29** ch. 9:3; Ps. 104:14, 15; 145:15, 16 **30** Ps. 147:9 **31** Eccles. 7:29; 1 Tim. 4:4 **CHAPTER 2 1** Deut. 4:19; Ps. 33:6 **2** Ex. 20:8–11; 31:17; Deut. 5:12–14; Heb. 4:4 **4** ch. 1:1 **5** [ch. 1:1, 12] **6** ch. 3:23 **7** ch. 3:19, 23; 18:27; Ps. 103:14; Eccles. 12:7; 1 Cor. 15:47 **8** ch. 7:22; Job 33:4; Isa. 2:22 **9** Job 27:3 **10** Cited 1 Cor. 15:45

⁷garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. ⁹The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, ¹⁰and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. ¹¹The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of ¹¹Havilah, where there is gold. ¹²And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴And the name of the third river is the ¹⁴Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The LORD God took the man ¹⁵and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ¹⁷you

shall not eat, for in the day that you eat ¹of it you ^mshall surely die.”

¹⁸Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; ¹⁸“I will make him a helper fit for ²him.” ¹⁹Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed ³every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and ¹⁹brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam ⁴there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹So the LORD God caused a ^qdeep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made ⁵into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said,

“This at last is ⁷bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was ⁴taken out of Man.”⁶

¹Or when you eat ²Or corresponding to; also verse 20 ³Or And out of the ground the LORD God formed ⁴Or the man ⁵Hebrew built

⁶The Hebrew words for woman (*ishshah*) and man (*ish*) sound alike

DID YOU KNOW?

The Euphrates (2:14) is the longest and most important river in southwest Asia. Early settlers depended on the river for commerce and agriculture. The Euphrates and Tigris rivers form what is today the Shatt-al-Arab, a waterway that flows into the Persian Gulf.

into Greek (the Septuagint) used the word *paradeisos*, from which comes the English term “paradise” (compare Luke 23:43), to translate the Hebrew term for “garden.” The abundance of the garden is suggested by the fact that it contained **every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food** (Gen. 2:9). This very abundance will later become a source of temptation (3:6). On the **tree of life**, see note on 3:22–24. On the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil**, see note on 2:17.

2:10–14 The description of the **river that flowed out of Eden** dividing into **four rivers** implies that Eden occupied a central location in the ancient world. In spite of the very specific details provided, however, Eden’s location remains a mystery. While the names **Tigris** and **Euphrates** are associated with the two rivers that surround Mesopotamia, the rivers **Pishon** and **Gihon**, as well as the regions of **Havilah** and **Cush**, have not been satisfactorily identified. The reference to **gold** and **onyx** points to the land’s rich resources.

2:15–16 The overall picture of Eden suggests that the park-like garden is part of a divine sanctuary. The man is **put in the garden to work it and keep it**. Since God commanded Adam to work before Adam had committed any sin, work did not come as a result of sin. Productive work is part of God’s good purpose for humans. The fact that God **commanded the man** implies that God gave the man a leadership role, including the responsibility to guard and care for all of creation (v. 15). This leadership role is related to Adam’s relationship with Eve as his wife, who was given as “a helper fit for him” (v. 18). (On the NT understanding of the relationship between husband and wife, see Eph. 5:22–33.)

2:17 The fruit of the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil** has been variously understood as giving (1) sexual awareness, (2) moral

discrimination, (3) moral responsibility, and (4) moral experience. Of these possibilities, the last is the most likely. If Adam disobeys God and eats the fruit of this tree, he will come to know evil by experience. **you shall surely die**. What kind of death does this threaten: physical, spiritual, or some combination of the two? The Hebrew word can be used for any of these ideas, and the only way to discover what “surely die” means in this case is to see what happens as the story unfolds (see note on 3:4–5). In the **day that you eat of it** it does not mean that death will come on that very day. It means that once the forbidden fruit is eaten, death will become a certainty.

2:18 **Not good** is a jarring contrast to 1:31. **Helper** is one who supplies strength in an area that is lacking in the one who is helped. **Fit for him** or “matching him” (see ESV footnote) is not the same as “like him.” A wife is not to be just like her husband but is to complement him. **I will make him** can also be translated “I will make *for* him,” which explains Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 11:9.

2:20 **The man gave names**. By naming the animals, the man demonstrates his authority over all the other creatures. **Adam**. See note on 5:1–2.

2:23–24 **This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh**. Compare 29:14. Marriage creates the closest of all human relationships. Heterosexual monogamy is the divine pattern for marriage that God established at creation. **Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife**. Marriage creates obligations that are more important than one’s duty to one’s parents. In ancient Israel, sons did not move away from home when they married. They lived near their parents and inherited their father’s land. But they “left” their parents in the sense of putting their wife’s welfare before that of their parents. The term “hold fast” is used elsewhere for practicing covenant faithfulness (e.g., Deut. 10:20). Thus, other Bible texts call marriage a “covenant” (e.g., Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14). Paul’s teaching on marriage in Eph. 5:25–32 is founded on this text. When a man leaves his parents and takes a wife, **they shall become one flesh**. That is, they become one

⁸ver. 15; ch. 13:10; Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 28:13; 31:8; Joel 2:3 ⁹ch. 3:22; Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14 ¹⁰ver. 17 ¹¹ch. 10:7, 29; 25:18; 1 Sam. 15:7 ¹²Dan. 10:4 ¹³ver. 8 ¹⁴ch. 3:1–3, 11, 17 ¹⁵Rom. 6:23; James 1:15 ¹⁶1 Cor. 11:9; 1 Tim. 2:13 ¹⁷ch. 1:20, 24 ¹⁸Ps. 8:6 ¹⁹ch. 15:12; 1 Sam. 26:12 ²⁰ch. 29:14; Judg. 9:2; 2 Sam. 5:1; 19:13; [Eph. 5:28–30] ²¹1 Cor. 11:8