

The Beginning

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth didn't have any shape. And it was empty. Darkness was over the surface of the ocean. At that time, the ocean covered the earth. The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

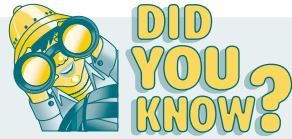
³God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good. He separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light "day." He called the darkness "night." There was evening, and there was morning. It was day one.

⁶God said, "Let there be a huge space between the waters. Let it separate water from water." ⁷And that's exactly what happened. God made the huge space between the waters. He separated the water that was under the space from the water that was above it. ⁸God called the huge space "sky." There was evening, and there was morning. It was day two.

⁹God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered into one place. Let dry ground appear." And that's exactly what happened. ¹⁰God called the dry ground "land." He called the waters that were gathered together "oceans." And God saw that it was good.

¹¹Then God said, "Let the land produce plants. Let them bear their own seeds. And let there be trees on the land that bear fruit with seeds in it. Let each kind of plant or tree have its own kind of seeds." And that's exactly what happened.

¹²The land produced plants. Each kind of plant had its own kind of seeds. The land produced trees that bore



What does *create* mean?

1:1 The word *create* means to "make something new." Genesis tells us that God is the creator of all things. You can find many things that God created in Genesis 1.

fruit with seeds in it. Each kind of tree had its own kind of seeds.

God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening, and there was morning. It was day three.

¹⁴God said, "Let there be lights in the huge space of the sky. Let them separate the day from the night. Let them serve as signs to mark off the seasons and the days and the years. ¹⁵Let them serve as lights in the huge space of the sky to give light on the earth." And that's exactly what happened.

¹⁶God made two great lights. He made the larger light to rule over the day. He made the smaller light to rule over the night. He also made the stars.

¹⁷God put the lights in the huge space of the sky to give light on the earth. ¹⁸He put them there to rule over the day and the night. He put them there to separate light from darkness.

God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening, and there was morning. It was day four.

²⁰God said, "Let the waters be filled with living things. Let birds fly above the earth across the huge space of the sky." ²¹So God created the great creatures of the ocean. He created every living and moving thing that fills the waters. He created all kinds of them. He created every kind of bird that flies. And God saw that it was good.

²²God blessed them. He said, "Have little ones and increase your numbers. Fill the water in the oceans. Let there be more and more birds on the earth."

²³There was evening, and there was morning. It was day five.

²⁴God said, "Let the land produce all kinds



In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

of living creatures. Let there be livestock, and creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals. Let there be all kinds of them.” And that’s exactly what happened.

²⁵God made all kinds of wild animals. He made all kinds of livestock. He made all kinds of creatures that move along the ground. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make man in our likeness. Let them rule over the fish in the waters and the birds of the air. Let them rule over the livestock and over the whole earth. Let them rule over all of the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷So God created man in his own likeness.

He created him in the likeness of God.

He created them as male and female.

²⁸God blessed them. He said to them, “Have children and increase your numbers. Fill the earth and bring it under your control. Rule over the fish in the waters and the birds of the air. Rule over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

²⁹Then God said, “I am giving you every plant on the face of the whole earth that bears its own seeds. I am giving you every tree that has fruit with seeds in it. All of them will be given to you for food.

³⁰“I am giving every green plant to all of the land animals and the birds of the air for food. I am also giving the plants to all of the creatures that move on the ground. I am giving them to

every living thing that breathes.” And that’s exactly what happened.

³¹God saw everything he had made. And it was very good. There was evening, and there was morning. It was day six.

2 So the heavens and the earth and everything in them were completed.

²By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing. So on the seventh day he rested from all of his work.

³God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. He rested on it. After he had created everything, he rested from all of the work he had done.

Adam and Eve

⁴Here is the story of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

The LORD God made the earth and the heavens. ⁵At that time, bushes had not appeared on the earth. Plants had not come up in the fields. The LORD God had not sent rain on the earth. And there wasn’t any man to work the ground. ⁶But streams came up from the earth. They watered the whole surface of the ground.

⁷Then the LORD God formed a man. He made him out of the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into him. And the man became a living person.

⁸The LORD God had planted a garden in the east. It was in Eden. There he put the man he had formed. ⁹The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground. Their fruit was pleasing to look at and good to eat.

The tree that gives life forever was in the middle of the garden. The tree that



Genesis 1:26–27

You’re Special

Read Genesis 1:26–27. God made us in his own image. We are God’s very special creation.

Look at pictures of your mom or dad when they were children. How were they like you? How were they different? Your parents love you very much because you are their child. You are like them in important ways. Ask your mom or dad to tell you why they think you are special.

God made you in his image too. You are special to God. He loves you. Write a letter to God to thank him for loving you.

³⁵Then the people sacrificed burnt offerings to the God of Israel. They had returned from Babylonia. They offered 12 bulls for the whole nation of Israel. They offered 96 rams and 77 male lambs. All of that was a burnt offering to the LORD. They sacrificed 12 male goats as a sin offering.

³⁶They also handed over the king's orders. They gave them to the royal officials and governors who ruled over the land west of the Euphrates River. Then those men helped the people. They also did many things for the house of God.

Ezra Prays for the People

9 After all of those things had been done, the leaders came to me. They said, "The people of Israel have committed sins. Even the priests and Levites have sinned. They haven't kept themselves separate from the nations that are around them. The LORD hates the practices of those nations. He hates what the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites and Jebusites do. He also hates what the Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites do.

²"The men of Israel have gotten married to the daughters of some of those people. They've also taken some of those women for their sons to marry. So they've mixed our holy nation with the nations around us. By getting married to women who don't worship the LORD, we leaders and officials have led the way in breaking our covenant with him. We haven't been faithful to him."

³When I heard that, I tore my inner robe

and my coat. I pulled hair from my head and beard. I was so shocked I sat down. ⁴Then everyone who trembled with fear because of what the God of Israel had said gathered around me. They came because the people who had returned from Babylonia had not been faithful. So I sat there in shock until the time of the evening sacrifice.

⁵Then I got up. I had been very sad for quite a while. My inner robe and my coat were torn. I fell down on my knees. I spread my hands out to the LORD my God. ⁶I prayed,

"You are my God. I'm filled with shame and dishonor. I can hardly look to you and pray. That's because our sins are piled up above our heads. Our guilt reaches all the way to the heavens. ⁷We are filled with it. It has been like that ever since the days of our people who lived long ago.

"Kings of other countries have killed many of us and our kings and priests with their swords. They've forced others to leave their own land. They've taken them away as prisoners. They've robbed others. They've made still others feel ashamed and dishonored.

"All of those things have happened to us because we've committed so many sins. And that's how things still are to this very day.

⁸"But you are the LORD our God. Now you have shown us your favor for

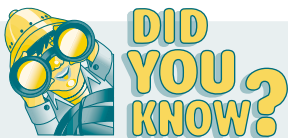


Wedding Celebrations

Weddings were happy times in Israel. For a week the bride and groom were

treated like a queen and king. There was music, dancing and feasting. But the people of Israel were forbidden to marry pagans, who did not worship the Lord. But many people had done just that. When Ezra heard about such weddings, he did not rejoice. He wept for shame and confessed the sin to God.





What special prayer did Ezra pray?

9:15 Ezra 9:6–15 is Ezra’s prayer of confession. When people confess, they own up to God about their sins. Then they ask God for forgiveness. Ezra’s prayer said that his people had sinned. Ezra was very upset. The people knew they had sinned. They admitted to God that they had sinned. You can read in Ezra 10 about how sorry the people were for their sins.

a short time. You have allowed a few of us to remain here. Your temple has given us new hope. So you have made things easier for us. You have given us a little rest from our slavery. ⁹We are still slaves. But you are our God. You haven’t deserted us. You haven’t left us in our slavery. You have been kind to us. The kings of Persia have seen it. You have given us new life to repair your temple and rebuild it. You have given us a place of safety in Judah and Jerusalem.

¹⁰“You are our God. What can we say after the way you have blessed us? We said no to what you commanded us to do.

¹¹“You gave us your commands through your servants the prophets. You said, ‘You are entering the land to take it as your own. The sinful practices of its people have polluted it. They have filled it with their unclean acts from one end to the other. The LORD hates all of their practices. ¹²So don’t let your daughters get married to their sons. And don’t let their daughters marry your sons. Don’t make a peace treaty with them at any time. Then you will be strong. You will eat the good things the land produces. And you will leave all of it to your children as their share. They and their children after them will enjoy it forever.’

¹³“Our evil acts and our terrible sins have brought about the things that

have happened to us. You are our God. Because we sinned so much, you should have punished us even more than you have. But you have left many of your people alive. ¹⁴Suppose we don’t obey your commands again. And suppose we continue to get married to people who commit sins that you hate. If we do, you will be so angry with us that you will destroy us. You won’t leave us even a few people. You won’t leave anyone alive.

¹⁵“LORD, you are the God of Israel. You are holy. You always do what is right. Today you have left many of your people alive. Here we are with all of our guilt. You see the guilt of our sin. Because we have sinned, not one of us can stand in front of you.”

The People Admit They Have Sinned

10 Ezra was praying and admitting to God that his people had sinned. He was sobbing and throwing himself down in front of the house of God. Then a large crowd gathered around him. Men, women and children were there. They too sobbed bitterly.

²Shecaniah spoke to Ezra. Shecaniah was the son of Jehiel. He belonged to the family line of Elam. Shecaniah said, “We haven’t been faithful to our God. We’ve gotten married to women from the nations that are around us. In spite of that, there is still hope for Israel. ³So let’s make a covenant in the sight of our God. Let’s promise to send away all of those women and their children. That’s what you have advised us to do. Those who respect our God’s commands have given us the same advice. We want to do what the Law says.

⁴“Get up, Ezra. This matter is in your hands. Do what you need to. We will be behind you all the way. Be brave and do it.”

⁵So Ezra got up. He made the leading priests and Levites and all of the people of Israel take an oath. He made them promise they would do what Shecaniah had suggested. And they took the oath.

⁶Then Ezra left the house of God. He went to Jehohanan’s room. Jehohanan was the son of Eliashib. While Ezra was there, he didn’t eat any food. He didn’t drink any water. That’s because he was filled with sadness. He sobbed because the people weren’t faithful to the LORD’s commands.



EZEKIEL

Who wrote this book?

The prophet Ezekiel wrote this book.

Why was this book written?

There are two parts to this book. The first part tells that people in Judah were bad. They did not obey God. God had tried to teach them to obey him. He had to punish them. The second part tells that God will bring his people back to their land. A new temple will be built in Jerusalem too.

What do we learn about God in this book?

God only does good things. He cannot do bad things. He cannot live with bad people.

What is special about this book?

Ezekiel tells the people what God says. Sometimes he acts out God's message. Ezekiel also describes a great temple. It will be built in Jerusalem someday.

When was this book written?

Ezekiel wrote this book after Jerusalem was destroyed.

Where was this book written?

The people of Judah were taken away from their homes. Ezekiel was taken too. He wrote this book when he was a slave in a far away land called Babylon.

What chapters tell about Ezekiel's experiences?

Ezekiel has a vision	Ezekiel 1
Ezekiel acts out the fall of Jerusalem	Ezekiel 4
Jerusalem is like a cooking pot	Ezekiel 24:1-14
Ezekiel is a guard for Israel	Ezekiel 33
Ezekiel has a vision of dry bones coming to life	Ezekiel 37:1-14

The LORD Gives Ezekiel Visions of His Glory

1 I was 30 years old. I was with my people who had been taken away from their country. We were by the Kebar River in the land of Babylonia. On the fifth day of the fourth month, the heavens were opened. I saw visions of God.

²It was the fifth day of the month. Jehoiachin had been king of Judah. It was the fifth year since he had been brought to Babylon as a prisoner. ³A message came to me from the LORD. I was by the Kebar River in Babylonia. The LORD put his strong hand on me there. I am Ezekiel, the son of Buzi. I'm a priest.

⁴I looked up and saw a windstorm coming from the north. I saw a huge cloud. The fire of lightning was flashing out of it. Bright light surrounded it. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal.

⁵I saw in the fire something that looked like four living creatures. They appeared to have the shape of a man. ⁶But each of them had four faces and four wings. ⁷Their legs were straight. Their feet looked like the feet of a calf. They were as bright as polished bronze.

⁸The creatures had a man's hands under their wings on their four sides. All four of them had faces and wings. ⁹Their wings touched one another. Each of the creatures went straight ahead. They didn't change their direction as they moved.

¹⁰Here's what their faces looked like. Each of the four creatures had a man's face. On the right side each had the face of a lion. On the left each had the face of an ox. Each

one also had an eagle's face. ¹¹That's what their faces looked like.

Two of their wings were spread out and lifted up. Each one touched the wing of another creature on either side. The other two wings covered their bodies. ¹²All of the creatures went straight ahead. Anywhere their spirits would lead them to go, they would go. They didn't change their direction as they went.

¹³The living creatures looked like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures. It was bright. Lightning flashed out of it. ¹⁴The creatures raced back and forth like flashes of lightning.

¹⁵As I looked at the living creatures, I saw wheels on the ground beside them. Each creature had four faces. ¹⁶Here's how the wheels looked and worked. They gleamed like chrysolite. All four of them looked alike. Each one seemed to be made like a wheel inside another wheel at right angles.

¹⁷The wheels could go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced. The wheels didn't change their direction as the creatures moved. ¹⁸Their rims were high and terrifying. All four rims were full of eyes all the way around them.

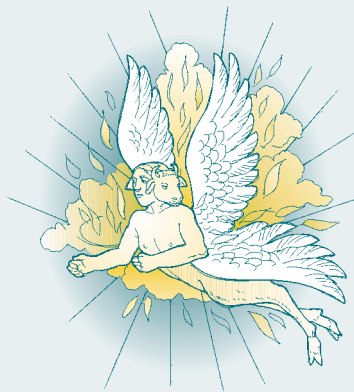
¹⁹When the creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved. When the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose. ²⁰Anywhere their spirits would lead them to go, they would go. And the wheels would rise along with them. That's because the spirits of the living creatures were in the wheels.



Living Creatures

Ezekiel describes these "living creatures" in much detail. Read Ezekiel 1:10-14

to find out what their faces were like. The living creatures were special angels called cherubim. They must have been awesome to see, with their four faces and four wings and the fire and lightning that came with them. Read Ezekiel 10 to find out more about them.



PEOPLE IN BIBLE TIMES



Silas

Silas was a leader in the early church. He carried letters from the Jewish leaders of the church in Jerusalem to new churches. Silas also went on other trips with Paul. He helped him with his missionary work.

the Jews. ³He explained and proved that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am telling you about is the Christ!” he said. ⁴His words won some of the Jews over. They joined Paul and Silas. A large number of Greeks who worshiped God joined them too. So did quite a few important women.

⁵But the Jews were jealous. So they rounded up some evil fellows from the market place. Forming a crowd, they started all kinds of trouble in the city. The Jews rushed to Jason’s house. They were looking for Paul and Silas. They wanted to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶But they couldn’t find them. So they dragged Jason and some other believers to the city officials. “These men have caused trouble all over the world,” they shouted. “Now they have come here. ⁷Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all disobeying Caesar’s commands. They say there is another king. He is called Jesus.”

⁸When the crowd and the city officials heard this, they became very upset. ⁹They made Jason and the others give them money. They wanted to make sure they would return to the court. Then they let them go.

Paul and Silas Are Sent to Berea

¹⁰As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. When they arrived, they went to the Jewish synagogue.

¹¹The Bereans were very glad to receive Paul’s message. They studied the Scriptures carefully every day. They wanted to see if what Paul said was true. So they were more noble than the Thessalonians. ¹²Many of the Jews believed. A number of

important Greek women also became believers. And so did many Greek men.

¹³The Jews in Thessalonica found out that Paul was preaching God’s word in Berea. So they went there too. They stirred up the crowds and got them all worked up.

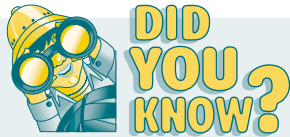
¹⁴Right away the believers sent Paul to the coast. But Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. ¹⁵The men who went with Paul took him to Athens. Then they returned with orders that Silas and Timothy were supposed to join him as soon as they could.

Paul Preaches in Athens

¹⁶Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens. He was very upset to see that the city was full of statues of gods. ¹⁷So he went to the synagogue. There he talked with Jews and with Greeks who worshiped God. Each day he spoke with anyone who happened to be in the market place.

¹⁸A group of Epicurean and Stoic thinkers began to argue with him. Some of them asked, “What is this fellow chattering about?” Others said, “He seems to be telling us about gods we’ve never heard of.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus. He was telling them that Jesus had risen from the dead.

¹⁹They took him to a meeting of the Areopagus. There they said to him, “What is this new teaching you’re giving us? ²⁰You have some strange ideas. We’ve never heard them before. We want to know what they mean.”



DID YOU KNOW?

What was Athens like?

17:16 Athens was a famous city in Greece. The people of Athens loved to talk. They liked to talk about important ideas. When Paul was in Athens, he talked to people about God. He told them that God made the world. He told them about Jesus. He told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. Acts 17 tells us what Paul said to the people of Athens.

PEOPLE IN BIBLE TIMES



Tentmakers

Many people lived in tents or used them when they travelled long distances. Tents were made from animal skins or from fabric woven of wool or goats' hair. The tentmaker sewed these materials together using needles and thread. It was expected that every Jewish boy would learn a special job or trade. Paul had been trained to be a tentmaker.

²¹All the people of Athens spent their time talking about and listening to the latest ideas. People from other lands who lived there did the same.

²²Then Paul stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus. He said, "Men of Athens! I see that you are very religious in every way. ²³As I walked around, I looked carefully at the things you worship. I even found an altar with TO AN UNKNOWN GOD written on it. Now I am going to tell you about this 'unknown god' that you worship.

²⁴"He is the God who made the world. He also made everything in it. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. He doesn't live in temples built by hands. ²⁵He is not served by human hands. He doesn't need anything. He himself gives life and breath to all people. He also gives them everything else they have. ²⁶From one man he made all the people of the world. Now they live all over the earth. He decided exactly when they should live. And he decided exactly where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that people would seek him. Then perhaps they would reach out for him and find him. They would find him even though he is not far from any of us. ²⁸"In him we live and move and exist.' As some of your own poets have also said, 'We are his children.'

²⁹"Yes, we are God's children. So we shouldn't think that God is made out of gold or silver or stone. He isn't a statue planned and made by clever people. ³⁰In the past, God didn't judge people for what they didn't know. But now he commands all people everywhere to turn away from their sins. ³¹He has set a day when he will judge the world fairly. He has appointed a man to be its judge. God has proved this to all people by raising that man from the dead."

³²When they heard Paul talk about the dead rising, some of them made fun of it. But others said, "We want to hear you speak about this again." ³³So Paul left the meeting of the Areopagus. ³⁴A few men became followers of Paul and believed in Jesus. Dionysius was one of them. He was a member of the Areopagus. A woman named Damaris also became a believer. And so did some others.

Paul Goes to Corinth

18 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²There he met a Jew named Aquila, who was a native of

Pontus. Aquila had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla. The emperor Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see Aquila and Priscilla. ³They were tentmakers, just as he was. So he stayed and worked with them. ⁴Every Sabbath day he went to the synagogue. He was trying to get both Jews and Greeks to believe in the Lord.

⁵Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia. Then Paul spent all his time preaching. He gave witness to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. ⁶But the Jews opposed Paul. They treated him badly. He didn't like this. So he shook out his clothes. Then he said to them, "Anything that happens to you will be your own fault! Don't blame me for it! From now on I will go to people who are not Jews."

⁷Then Paul left the synagogue. He went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a man who worshiped God. ⁸Crispus was the synagogue ruler. He and his whole family came to believe in the Lord. Many others who lived in Corinth heard Paul. They too believed and were baptized.

⁹One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Keep on speaking. Don't be silent. ¹⁰I am with you. No one will attack you and harm you. I have many people in this city." ¹¹So Paul stayed there for a year and a half. He taught them God's word.

¹²At that time Gallio was governor of Achaia. The Jews got together and attacked Paul. They brought him into court. ¹³"This man," they charged, "is trying to talk people into worshipping God in ways that are against the law."