

SHAPED BY SCRIPTURE

In the Beginning

# GENESIS

1-11

ALEX VARUGHESE

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# WEEK 1, DAY 2

## GENESIS 1:1-2:3

### The Setting

It is customary to begin the study of a biblical story by asking questions about its historical, cultural, religious, and literary setting. Since Genesis 1:1-2:3 reports what Christians consider to be the first event in history, these questions are difficult to ask about this passage. Because the Bible does not speak of any prior activity of God, we let the events reported Genesis 1:1-2:3 serve as the foundational setting of all the events that follow throughout the rest of Genesis as well as the rest of the Bible. Therefore, when we read any other story in the Bible, we interpret it through the lens of this creation story. We will then be able to discover whether that story upholds the theological claims made in the creation story.

Abraham's faith in God as the creator became the beginning point of the Israelites' faith traditions (see Genesis 14:22). In Genesis 1:1-2:3, we find the inspired writer's clear articulation of Israel's faith that elevates the God of Israel as the supreme creator of heaven and earth. Most scholars think the actual writing of this account took place in the sixth century BC, during the exile of the Jews (Israelites) in Babylon.

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### The Plot

To discover the plot of Genesis 1, let's first look at the way the story is structured by its writer. These verses are a carefully developed story of creation; the writer leaves several clues to help the readers recognize its arrangement. We will discover them as we engage this story. For the purpose of our study, we divide this story into eleven paragraphs. Let's examine each of those eleven paragraphs. **Below, write down next to each grouping of verses the main event or theme those verses report (follow the pattern provided for 1:1-2, 3-5, 26-28; 2:2-3).**

#### 1. Genesis 1:1-2

*God created the heavens and the earth; the earth didn't have any form, and everything was dark.*

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#### 2. Genesis 1:3-5

*God created light and separated the light from the darkness.*

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3. Genesis 1:6 8

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4. Genesis 1:9 10

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5. Genesis 1:11 13

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6. Genesis 1:14 19

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7. Genesis 1:20 23

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8. Genesis 1:24 25

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9. Genesis 1:26 28

God created humankind in God's image and placed them as rulers over the earth and over all non-human creatures.

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10. Genesis 1:29 2:1

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11. Genesis 2:2 3

God rested on the seventh day, blessed it, and made it holy.

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## WEEK 1, DAY 3

### WORD STUDY NOTES #1

<sup>1</sup> God is always the subject of the verb “created” (*bara*) in the Old Testament; thus, the Hebrew form of the word we translate as “create” denotes an action only God can perform.

<sup>2</sup> “Formless and empty” (*tohu vavohu*) portrays the earth’s condition as desert-like or unproductive and vacant; the Hebrew noun *tohu* also reflects a condition that lacks order.

<sup>3</sup> “Darkness” in verse 2 is simply the absence of light.

<sup>4</sup> “The Spirit of God” (*ruach ’elohim*) refers here to the powerful presence of God. The phrase “hovering over” is meant to bring to mind something like a mother bird hovering over her nest to protect her fledglings.

### WORD STUDY NOTES #2

<sup>1</sup> The word “good” here is not the opposite of evil; it simply conveys God’s assessment that what God created will perform its intended function.

## What’s Happening in the Story?

As we notice certain circumstances in the story, we will begin to see how they are similar to or different from the realities of our world. The story will become the lens through which we see the world in which we live today. In our study today, you may encounter words and/or phrases that are unfamiliar to you. Some of the particular words and translation choices for them have been explained in more detail in the **Word Study Notes**. If you are interested in even more help or detail, you can supplement this study with a Bible dictionary or other Bible study resource.

### 1. Genesis 1:1-2

The story begins with the writer’s affirmation that what we see above (“the heavens”) and what we see around us (“the earth”) are created<sup>1</sup> by God. The author describes the condition of the earth as unproductive and vacant.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the earth was covered by the waters (“the deep”). Verse 2 also says that “darkness”<sup>3</sup> loomed over the surface of the waters. Verse 2 concludes with the picture of this desolate and dark condition of the earth under the powerful, caring, and protective presence of God.<sup>4</sup>

### 2. Genesis 1:3-5

Light appears as God commands. Here we see the first of the nine instances of “And God said” in this story (see vv. 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29). Verse 4 says that God sees and calls the light “good.”<sup>1</sup> God repeats this evaluation six more times throughout the chapter (see vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31). Verse 4 also shows a world where light and darkness are separated by God so that day and night have their existence in separate times and spheres. The naming of the light and the darkness as “day” and “night” indicates that they have divinely assigned functions to carry out in creation. The references to “evening,” “morning,” and “the first day” place God’s creation activities within time as we know it (see the repetition of this statement in vv. 8, 13, 19, 23, and 31).

### 3. Genesis 1:6–8

God gives a command (“let there be a vault”), announces God’s intention (“to separate water from water”), then proceeds to make the vault (“sky”), and separates the waters that cover the entire surface of the earth. The naming of the vault conveys its divinely assigned function. The scene portrayed of the sky here is that of a bowl set upside down on the earth with water both above and beneath it.<sup>1</sup>

**Practice the above pattern to jot down a summary description of the world and reality that is portrayed in verses 9–10.**

### 4. Genesis 1:9–10

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### 5. Genesis 1:11–13

The land responds to God’s command and produces seed-bearing plants and fruit-bearing trees. Here we find the first signs of life appearing on the earth. These plants and trees are not all alike; they belong to a variety of different kinds, or groups.

### 6. Genesis 1:14–19

God gives a command (“let there be lights in the vault of the sky”) and delegates certain tasks (“separate the day from the night,” “serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years,” “to give light on the earth”). God then proceeds to make “two great lights,” the “greater” one to rule the day and the “lesser” one to rule the night. God also places stars in the sky. The scene thus presents these heavenly bodies as God’s direct creation. They exist to carry out the functions God assigned to them.

### WORD STUDY NOTES #3

<sup>1</sup> The ancient readers of this story would have understood the water above the vault as the source of rain, snow, and other forms of precipitation (see Genesis 7:11–12; 8:2; Job 38:22–41).

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You don’t have to have a master’s degree in biblical scholarship or languages to learn to think about the text in a way that helps you both understand the words and imagine the bigger reality behind them.

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**WORD STUDY NOTES #9**

<sup>1</sup> Though some Christians see the word “our” as a reference to the Trinity, others interpret it as a plural of divine majesty, God’s self-exhortation. Even though as Christians we believe creation is the activity of the Trinitarian God, it is unlikely that an Israelite writer would have meant to convey that here.

<sup>2</sup> “Image” and “likeness” are used as synonyms here; both convey the idea that God created humans to mirror or reflect God and thus be God’s representatives in the world.

<sup>3</sup> The command to “subdue” the earth most likely means to engage in the difficult task of cultivating the earth, thereby making it productive (see the human task in 2:5, 15). In the same way, the verb “rule over” in reference to the animals conveys the idea of caring for and tending the animals—tasks carried out by shepherds in the ancient world.

## 7. Genesis 1:20–23

Animal life appears for the first time. God creates living creatures to inhabit the space of the sea and birds to occupy the earth and the space above the earth. We see here only a very general portrait of the creatures that inhabit the sea (“great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems”). God who creates also blesses creation in the very first instance of God’s blessing we find in the Bible. The divine blessing endows the sea creatures and the birds with the capacity to populate the seas and the earth. This particular blessing (“be fruitful and increase in number”) is also a command to participate with God in the continuation of God’s creational activities.

**Create your own brief description of the world/reality portrayed in verses 24–25.**

## 8. Genesis 1:24–25

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## 9. Genesis 1:26–28

God announces the intent to make humankind “in our image, in our<sup>1</sup> likeness.”<sup>2</sup> God makes humankind in his own image and with male and female identity. God blesses humankind with the blessing of procreation and gives them the command to populate the earth “and subdue it,” to rule over all the living creatures in the sea, in the sky, and on the land.<sup>3</sup> As God’s royal representative, humankind is being charged with the task of caring for and nurturing God’s creation.

**Write your own brief description of the world and reality portrayed in verses 1:29–2:1.**

## 10. Genesis 1:29–2:1

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## 11. Genesis 2:2–3

God rests from creation activities on the seventh day of creation.<sup>1</sup> God blesses and makes the seventh day holy, a day set apart from the ordinary days of work.

### WORD STUDY NOTES #11

<sup>1</sup> Saying God “rested” (*shabat*) means God ceased the work of creating the heavens and the earth.

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## Discoveries

Let’s summarize our discoveries from Genesis 1:1–2:3.

1. The earth does not remain in its original unproductive and vacant condition. God transforms it into a place with order and productivity and makes it the home of all that we see around and above us.
2. Everything God made has a space for its existence and a divinely assigned function that it is capable of carrying out.
3. Creation participates with God in creation activities.
4. God relates to creation by bestowing God’s blessing upon it, which facilitates the creation’s continued existence and growth.
5. God created humankind, both male and female, in God’s image. Their individual and collective status as God’s representatives is an important part of the order God established for creation.
6. God gave humankind the mandate to populate and be stewards of the earth and its creatures.
7. God finished work and rested on the seventh day.