

Genesis 1-2:3 – The Creation

Introduction

Last time, we discussed our approach to our Genesis study, emphasizing that we take Genesis (and the entire Bible) as the Spirit-breathed Word of God. While acknowledging that we might not be able to fully comprehend His Word, we will take it on faith that it is indeed His Word given by him as Paul wrote to Timothy –

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. **2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)**

Out of respect for His Word, we will therefore always err on the side of a literal interpretation of the text except in those instances where the context and the text itself clearly indicates a symbolic interpretation. We agreed to base our study of Genesis on these principles along with several general approaches to the study:

- We will seek the guidance and illumination of God’s Spirit in our studies.
- We will make no scientific or humanistic rationalization for God’s miracles we find detailed in the book of Genesis – simply taking them as we read them by faith accepting that we can never really explain them.
- We will seek the Gospel of Jesus in the scripture passages of Genesis.

In our first session, we also set the ambitious goal to go through the text roughly 2-3 chapters at a time, fully recognizing that this approach will mean we can’t really dive into the text as deeply as we might otherwise be able to do. We saw that the Genesis narrative is divided into five major sections...

1. [Genesis 1-5](#) – Creation to the flood of Noah.
2. [Genesis 6-11](#) – The flood of Noah to God’s calling of Abram.
3. [Genesis 12-25](#) – The stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael.
4. [Genesis 26-36](#) – The stories of Esau and Jacob.
5. [Genesis 37-50](#) – The story of Joseph and the beginning of Israel’s Egyptian captivity.

We then took a brief look at the authorship and dating of the book of Genesis, agreeing to hold the traditional assumption that Moses was the scribe whom God used to write Genesis and the other four of the Bible’s first five books – known as the Pentateuch, the Torah, and The Law of Moses. We saw that this assumption leads us to a latest possible date for the writing of Genesis at about 1500 BC when Moses died.

We concluded our first Genesis session with a detailed discussion of the Bible’s first two verses. We saw that God makes no apologetic in His Word – simply assuming that everyone knows and believes in His eternal nature. We also saw that the use of the Hebrew (multiple) plural form – **אלהים** ‘**ēlōhîm** – referring to God as the subject of the sentence in [Genesis 1:1](#) speaks of the multiple nature of the Holy Trinity, but the use of the singular verb – **ברא** **bārā’** – translated as “created” in the same verse emphasizes the unified nature of the triune Godhead.

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ASIDE – Names are important.

Before we launch into our study, there is another element of our approach to the study which I neglected to mention in our last session but is nevertheless important in helping us fully understand the text.

Juliet, in Shakespeare's play asks, "What's in a name?" She goes on to answer that what we call someone is unimportant and doesn't really change their character. But in God's Word, we find quite the opposite. Names for people and places in the Bible often have quite significant meanings. God often commands expectant parents to call their coming children by specific names. Perhaps the most famous example is Jesus Himself, whose Name means "The LORD is salvation." Therefore, in our Genesis study we will focus on the meanings of many of the names we find in the text, knowing that their meanings can offer us added insight.

The Days of Creation

Genesis 1 lists the six days of God's creation of the universe and the life within it – including mankind. Each scripture passages detailing a day of creation ends with the phrase – "***And there was evening and there was morning, the [Nth] day.***" Of course, until the third day, there was no earth revolving on its axis, and until the fourth day, there was no sun or moon. Therefore, without these aspects of our world by which we characterize day and night and measure the passage of time, we have no way to determine how long or short the days mentioned in the narrative were. Therefore, we will not speculate. What we know without doubt is that God has called them "days," so we will simply take Him at His Word and leave it at that.

¹In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without 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. Genesis 1:1-2 (ESV)

We looked in some detail at these first two verses last time. We won't revisit that discussion, except to say that they tell us that God was even before there was any such thing as "before." God created time itself by the power of His very Word as we shall soon see.

Day 1

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. Genesis 1:3-5 (ESV)

There are two major principles we need to take away from the story of this first day.

1. It was the **Word of God** through whom the world was created. That Word was and is Jesus – God the Son.

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made

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through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. John
1:1-3 (ESV)

...

14And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John
1:14 (ESV)

...

11Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. 13He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. Revelation 19:11-13 (ESV)

2. Light and darkness cannot exist together. They must continually remain separated, just as God separated them on this first day of creation. This principle applies to both physical light and darkness and to spiritual light and darkness. Jesus Himself is spiritual light.

12Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12 (ESV)

John affirms this in his vision of the New Jerusalem.

23And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. Revelation 21:23 (ESV)

Day 2

6And God said, “Let there be an expanse [רָקִיעַ rāqīa] in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” 7And God made [עָשָׂה ‘āśâ] the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. 8And God called the expanse Heaven [שָׁמַיִם šamayim]. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. Genesis 1:6-8 (ESV)

To the ancient Hebrew mind, Heaven (sometimes also translated as sky) is a solid expanse – רָקִיעַ **rāqīa**. God says here that this expanse (called a firmament in the KJV) separated waters above from waters below it. This will become significant when we look at the story of the great flood in Genesis 7.

Notice in verse 7 the first use of עָשָׂה **‘āśâ**. It is translated here as “made,” but could also be translated as “fabricated.” It is distinct from the word בָּרָא **bārā'** we find translated as “created” in Genesis 1:1. This word עָשָׂה **‘āśâ** implies putting something together from component parts – matter, space, time, and energy in the case of Heaven here in Genesis 1:7, while בָּרָא **bārā'** implies creation of something out of nothing which is what God’s Word did in Genesis 1:1 when He created the time, space, matter, and energy from which He formed the rest of the world on Day 2 and afterward.

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Before we move on, notice in verse 8, the Hebrew word שָׁמַיִם *šāmayim* translated as Heaven in English is plural. In ancient Hebrew cosmology there were believed to be three heavens – the first being the Earth’s atmosphere, the second being the realm of the moon, stars, sun, planets, and other visible celestial objects, that the third heaven being the invisible realm of God and His angels. Paul wrote of a vision of the third heaven in his second letter to the church at Corinth.

²I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.

2 Corinthians 12:2 (ESV)

Day 3

⁹And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, [אֶרֶץ ‘ereṣ] and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas [יָם yām]. And God saw that it was good. Genesis 1:9-10 (ESV)

The Hebrew word אֶרֶץ *‘ereṣ* can mean Earth, land, or world. It is the same word we find in Genesis 1:1. The word יָם *yām* can also refer to freshwater lakes. Notice that God once again used His Word to establish the Earth and the seas rather than what we would ordinarily think of as a physical process.

¹¹And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing [עֵשֶׂה ‘āśâ] fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing [עֵשֶׂה ‘āśâ] fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. Genesis 1:11-13 (ESV)

This is significant. Only God can bestow life. It is His gift to His creatures – not to be taken lightly. Notice also that He created the plants “*each according to its kind*.” We do not see even a hint of any evolutionary process by which one kind of life changes into another.

NOTE – It’s a good thing that Day 4 quickly followed Day 3. Otherwise, photosynthesis would have been impossible for the new plants to accomplish. But I digress...

Day 4

¹⁴And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶And God made [עֵשֶׂה ‘āśâ] the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it

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was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

Genesis 1:14-19 (ESV)

The descriptions we find in Genesis about the formation of the heavenly bodies seem to contradict what we know from cosmology about how stars and planets are formed in both process and order. Our brief scientific observations over the last millennium tell us that stars like the sun come about through accretion of matter by gravity until the pressure ignites the star's atomic fusion engine, and that when the fusion process can no longer be supported, stars stop shining and often expel most of the material that formed them back into the cosmos. Furthermore, planets are apparently formed concurrently with their parent stars by the same accretion process and from the same material. Of course, we know that the moon does not emit its own light, but only reflects the light of the sun.

So how are we to handle this seeming conundrum? The quick and easy rationalization is that the ancient people to whom God gave His Word would have been confused by a more precise description of His creative work. But to me that seems a little convenient, and a little arrogant of us to think that we modern people are somehow better able to handle the truth. In fact, in many ways, modern people are less competent to face facts than most of our forebears.

For now, we must leave these questions to the side. The main take-away from Genesis 1:14-19 remains that God Himself created the universe by the power of His Word. We neither know nor can ever know the full details. Nor do we have a right to question how He decided to describe His work of creation for us. Furthermore, climatology tells us that God has made the Earth to be a perfect distance from the sun, the sun to be the perfect magnitude and size, the tilt of the earth's axis to be the perfect angle, etc. for the support of life on our planet. God knows what He intended for His creation and exactly what was needed to bring it about.

Day 5

²⁰And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." ²¹So 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. ²²And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." ²³And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day. Genesis 1:20-23 (ESV)

This account of the fifth day of God's creative work is borne out in the fossil record. The rapid appearance of a wide variety of creatures has been called the Cambrian explosion. Of course, modern science explains it as the evolution of hard shells and skeletons in previous life forms which had only soft tissue which is less easily fossilized than bone and shell. But God's Word tells us that He created each variety of life we see today and those which have since become extinct "*according to its kind.*"

Day 6

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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 [אֲשָׁא 'āsâ] 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. Genesis 1:24-25 (ESV)

The sixth day is the fulfillment of God’s creation – beginning with the land animals and culminating with the creation of mankind. Once again God’s Word reiterates that He created each variety of life we see today and those which have since become extinct “**according to its kind.**” Of course, this flies in the face of the modern scientific acceptance and promulgation of the idea of uniformitarian evolution from one life form to another through reinforcement of beneficial mutations and elimination of non-beneficial ones – so-called “survival of the fittest.”

26 Then God [אֱלֹהִים 'ēlōhîm] said, “Let us make [אָדָם 'ādām] man [אֲשָׁא 'āsâ] in our image, after our likeness. And 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.” Genesis 1:26 (ESV)

Reading the first sentence of the Hebrew text of Genesis 1:26 gives me new appreciation for the translators of the KJV and subsequent English language “literal” translations. This simple sentence is grammatically complex. Literally word-for-word, the text reads “**say God make man image likeness.**” The first thing to note is that God ([אֱלֹהִים 'ēlōhîm]) – the subject of the sentence – is the true plural form which we looked at in Genesis 1:1. The verb of the sentence – [אֲשָׁא 'āsâ] – is also plural, matching the subject (not as with the purposeful subject-verb mismatch we found in Genesis 1:1). The direct object of the sentence – [אָדָם 'ādām] – is the Hebrew word for “man” matching this first man’s proper name. The words image and likeness are of course nouns. But in the Hebrew text of this sentence, they are modified to connect them with the subject of the sentence (God) as possessives. Furthermore, these are plural (multiple) forms of these nouns. Therefore, the KJV translators and those who inherited their amazing work, were quite correct in rendering the words image and likeness as “**...in our image and after our likeness...**”

If we quickly scan over God’s previous works of creation, we find none of which God said they were made “**...in our image and after our likeness...**” God says that only of mankind. This puts to rest the ideas of animism – the idea that all created things (including inanimate ones) possess divine souls – and pantheism – the idea that God **is** His creation. But God’s declaration that He has made mankind “**...in our image and after our likeness...**” does open the door to the blasphemous worship of human beings as the image bearers of God. If we carefully look at the text though we find that the phrase “**...in our image and after our likeness...**” certainly does not imply “**...identical to ourselves...**” Thus, people are not to be worshiped – God forbid. We find numerous instances in God’s Word where people were rebuked for worshipping other created beings (e.g. angels or prophets) rather than worshipping their Creator alone.

Before we move on, notice that God has clearly given mankind dominion over all other created things abiding on the Earth. This is a great God-given blessing that bears with it a heavy responsibility which fallen mankind has severely neglected and abused.

27 So God [אֱלֹהִים 'ēlōhîm] created [בָּרָא bārā'] man in his own image, in the image of God he created [בָּרָא bārā'] him;

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male and female he created [בָּרָא bārā'] *them*. Genesis 1:27 (ESV)

ASIDE – This is the first poem found in the Word of God.

Here in Genesis 1:27, we find a repetition of the purposeful grammatical error we saw in Genesis 1:1 – the multiple subject God אֱלֹהִים 'ēlōhîm mismatched with the singular verb created בָּרָא bārā'. We have already discussed the significance of this reference to the work of the Holy Trinity in our detailed look at Genesis 1:1-2

This verse was famously quoted by Jesus in Matthew 19:4 as part of His dispute with the Pharisees about marriage and divorce. Certainly, Genesis 1:27 is also a clear proof text against transgenderism and the very idea of gender fluidity. If indeed mankind is created in God's image, these ideas are not only incorrect – they are truly blasphemous.

²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, “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.” ²⁹And 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. You shall have them for food. ³⁰And to 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 [חַי hay], I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Genesis 1:28-31 (ESV)

This passage stands on its own, but I do have a few minute comments about it.

1. In verse 30 the ESV, CSB, and NIV render the Hebrew word חַי hay as “*has the breath of life*.” All the other versions at my disposal including the KJV and NKJV render it as “*has life*.” I won't go so far as to say the ESV, CSB, and NIV mistranslate the passage. Those who did that work surely wanted to make a clear (and correct) point – to distinguish between plants which do not eat other creatures for their sustenance, and all other life forms which require food to survive. Nevertheless, I do feel these translators introduced something of their own into the translation rather than adhering strictly to the source text.
2. Until the fall of man that we will read about in Genesis 3, all creatures needing food relied on plants for their nourishment.
3. This is the first commandment given by God to mankind – to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it, and to have dominion over the animals.

Before we press on into Genesis 2, take note of verse 31 where God looked upon his finished creation and saw that it was “...*very good*.” On the previous days (except Day 2) God had looked upon the works of the Day and found them good. But the completed creation taken as a whole, He found to be **very** good. Indeed, God's creation was entirely perfect until mankind allowed his own sin to bring corruption into it. But that's a story for another time.

The First Sabbath

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2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. Genesis 2:1-3 (ESV)

God did not formalize the law of the sabbath rest until much later when He commanded the Israelites during their wilderness wandering following their exodus from Egypt not to try to gather manna on the seventh day (Exodus 16:23-26). Most famously, God wrote this directive by His own finger on the stone tablets of the Law He delivered to Moses on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:8). But here in Genesis 2:1-3 we find God implementing this principle of weekly rest by His own example. The seventh day of rest, is a magnificent God-given blessing that has sadly fallen by the way in modern society – even among Jesus followers, I’m ashamed to say.

God certainly didn’t need to rest on the seventh day. He has no physical body that needs sleep and leisure for its own maintenance. Nor does God’s Spirit ever get weary, although He certainly does sometimes grieve. But since God Himself built into us a need for periodic rest, He demonstrated the principle by His own example, and ordained it among His creatures from the beginning, although He didn’t formalize it as a law until later.

Looking Ahead

In the remainder of Genesis 2, we find a reiteration of God’s creation of mankind filling in the details of the brief synopsis we saw in Genesis 1:27-28. As we shall see, although God created man and woman in sinless perfection, He knew that He would need to offer us our own power to choose between worshiping and loving our Creator wholeheartedly as He desired when He created us or turning away from Him in rebellion trying to fulfill our own desires apart from God’s will. Of course, we know from Genesis 3 that the first man and woman chose “unwisely.” We’ll look at the creation and fall of man in detail next time.