

# THE FIRST BOOK OF MOSES CALLED GENESIS

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**T**HE WORDS, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” have evoked considerable debate; but without apology, that is how this book begins. In the words of one of the historic creeds: “I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” These words are only the beginning of this book of beginnings—a prologue to a prologue. Genesis gives more than an account of creation. It also describes other beginnings—humanity’s Fall into sin and the start of God’s elaborate rescue mission for all peoples. It tells what happened *first* in many important respects (creation, sin, judgment, languages, races, marriage); but at the center of Genesis lies God’s sovereign call to Abram and Sarai, a couple of idol worshippers in the Middle East.

**AUTHOR AND BACKGROUND** ♦ The Book of Genesis was written and compiled by Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai. Biblical and extrabiblical evidence points to this fact. Jesus clearly assumes Mosaic authorship of Genesis in the statement, “Moses therefore gave you circumcision” (cf. also Acts 15:1). Since the reason for circumcision is mentioned only in Genesis 17, Jesus had to be referring to Moses’ compilation of the story. Second, both Jewish and Christian tradition unanimously agree with this biblical testimony: Moses compiled and wrote the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, in the Wilderness of Sinai. This would place his authorship of Genesis around the fifteenth century B.C.

Many scholars since the nineteenth century have denied Moses’ authorship of Genesis. Instead, some of these scholars have suggested that the Pentateuch, including Genesis, was compiled at a later date, perhaps in the sixth century B.C. According to this analysis, anonymous editors used at least four documents to piece together the Pentateuch. These four documents were identified by tracing the divine names, such as *Elohim* and *Yahweh*, through the Pentateuch, and by tracing certain variations in phraseology and word choice. The four documents are called: the J document, which uses *Yahweh* for God; the E document, which uses *Elohim* for God; the P or Priestly document; and the D or Deuteronomic document. More recently, this dissection of the Pentateuch has been challenged, and no real consensus has emerged from the ensuing scholarly debate.

By appreciating the unified structure of Genesis, Moses’ guiding hand in the compilation and authorship of Genesis can be discerned. Certainly, Moses used other literary sources to piece together his narrative. Sometimes these sources are identified (see Gen. 5:1). Moses presumably edited these older documents to make them understandable to his readers—the second Israelite generation after the Exodus. And later prophets updated the language for the ensuing generations of Israelite readers.

But after all the analysis, it is clear that Moses wrote and compiled Genesis to encourage the early Israelites while they were preparing to enter the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. The content of Genesis would have been especially significant to them. It explains why their ancestors went to Egypt in the first place, why their nation was destined for another Promised Land, and why God had revealed Himself so dramatically to them in the wilderness.

**PRINCIPAL MESSAGE** ♦ Genesis, the book of beginnings, has two parts. The first part (chs. 1–11) serves as a prologue to the second part (chs. 12–50), the book’s main event—God’s sovereign work in Abraham’s family to accomplish His good will for all nations. This prologue (chs. 1–11) provides keys that unlock the rest of the book and the rest of the Bible as well.

Four key concepts presented in Genesis 1–11 are crucial for comprehending the rest of the Bible. First, the God who entered the lives of Abram and Sarai is the same God who created the entire universe. He is the only true and living God—Yahweh, the Creator and the Savior of the world. Second, all people have rebelled against God, their benevolent Creator, and His good will for them. Humanity has inherited a state of sinfulness from Adam and Eve’s rebellion in the garden of Eden. Third, God judges and will judge the actions of all people. God, by sending the Flood, made it clear to Noah and to everyone that human wickedness is entirely unacceptable. God cannot let evil reign free in His creation.

Fourth, sin continues to plague all of humanity—even after the Flood. Although the Flood did not wash away sin, God, as the second half of Genesis (chs. 12–50) reveals, has a plan to save humanity from its own evil deeds.

The first part of Genesis provides the setting for the story of Abram and Sarai (chs. 12–50). Their world is populated by a broad spectrum of people groups, each with its own language, customs, values, and beliefs, and all have adopted their own imaginary gods.

The main story of Genesis—God’s plan to bless all nations through Abraham’s descendants—starts in chapter 12. It begins with God’s call to Abram and Sarai (Abraham and Sarah) to become the parents of a new people—a new nation. This new nation would become God’s tool for blessing all peoples. Even though Abram and Sarai were merely an elderly couple with the means to travel, God chose to begin His plan of redemption for the entire world with them. The description of their experiences demonstrates the *irruption* (the breaking into from without) of God’s blessing into their lives. Central to God’s blessing was His covenant with Abraham—the *Abrahamic covenant* (see 12:1–3; 15:1–21). God, the awesome Creator of the entire universe, freely chose to make everlasting promises to Abraham and his descendants. These promises in the Abrahamic covenant were the foundation for all of God’s subsequent promises and covenants in the Bible. Genesis is not merely a beginning; it provides the foundation for the rest of the biblical narrative.

### TIMELINE FOR GENESIS

- undatable** Creation, the Flood, the Tower of Babel
- c. 2167 B.C.** Abraham is born in Ur of the Chaldeans
- c. 2091 B.C.** Abraham is called to set out for Canaan
- c. 2066 B.C.** Isaac is born to Abraham and Sarah
- c. 2006 B.C.** Jacob is born to Isaac and Rebekah
- c. 1991 B.C.** Abraham dies in Canaan
- c. 1915 B.C.** Joseph is born to Jacob and Rachel
- c. 1886 B.C.** Isaac dies in Canaan
- c. 1876 B.C.** Jacob and his family move to Egypt
- c. 1859 B.C.** Jacob dies in Egypt
- c. 1805 B.C.** Joseph dies in Egypt

## CHRIST IN THE SCRIPTURES

According to the New Testament, Adam is “a type of Him who was to come” (Rom. 5:14). In other words, Adam’s life in some ways points vividly to Jesus. Consider that both individuals entered the world through a special act of God, as sinless men. But while Adam is the head of the old creation, Christ is the Head of a new creation.

Melchizedek (whose name literally means “king of righteousness”) is a strange and shadowy figure who suddenly appears in Genesis 14. He is the king of Salem (which means “peace”); the Bible calls him “the priest of God Most High.” Some scholars believe that this one who was, in the words of Hebrews 7:3, “made like the Son of God,” was in fact Christ Himself. Christ, after all, is known as the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6).

Joseph's character and experiences (chs. 39–50) foreshadow the coming of the Messiah in that both Joseph and Christ are objects of special love by their fathers, hated by their brothers, rejected as rulers over their brothers, conspired against and sold for silver, condemned though innocent, and raised from humiliation to glory by the power of God.

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## GENESIS OUTLINE

### Prologue

- I. The stories of Creation and the Fall 1:1—3:24
  - A. Creation: the seven days 1:1—2:3
  - B. Creation: the making of man and woman 2:4–25
  - C. The fall of humankind and God's judgment on Adam and Eve 3:1–24
- II. The family of Adam and Eve 4:1—5:32
  - A. Cain and Abel 4:1–26
  - B. The family history of Adam and Eve 5:1–32
- III. The Flood 6:1—9:29
  - A. The sons of God and the daughters of men 6:1–4
  - B. The choosing of Noah 6:5–22
  - C. The arrival of the Flood 7:1–24
  - D. The abating of the waters 8:1–22
  - E. The aftermath 9:1–29
- IV. The early nations and the Tower of Babel 10:1—11:32

### Main Section

- I. Abram and Sarai (Abraham and Sarah) 12:1—25:34
  - A. Abram and Sarai and their early experiences in the land of Canaan 12:1—15:21
  - B. Abram and Sarai's search for a son 16:1—22:24
  - C. Abraham and Sarah's last days 23:1—25:34
- II. Isaac and Rebekah 26:1—27:45
  - A. Isaac and Abimelech 26:1–33
  - B. Isaac's blessing on his two sons Jacob and Esau 27:1–45
- III. Jacob and Esau 27:46—36:43
  - A. The sending of Jacob to Laban 27:46—28:5
  - B. Esau's marriage to a daughter of Ishmael 28:6–9
  - C. God's self-revelation to Jacob at Bethel 28:10–22
  - D. Jacob's family 29:1—30:24
  - E. Jacob's dealings with Laban in Padan Aram 30:25—31:55
  - F. The reconciliation of Jacob and Esau 32:1—33:20
  - G. Dinah and her brothers 34:1–31
  - H. The last days of Isaac 35:1–29
  - I. The family records of Esau 36:1–43
- IV. Joseph (with two interludes) 37:1—50:26
  - A. Joseph's dreams and a family nightmare 37:1–36
  - B. Interlude 1: Judah and Tamar 38:1–30
  - C. Joseph's humiliation in Egypt 39:1—40:23
  - D. Joseph's exaltation in Egypt 41:1–57
  - E. Joseph's reunion with his family 42:1—47:31
  - F. Interlude 2: Jacob's last days 48:1—50:14
  - G. Joseph's last days 50:15–26

## The History of Creation

Gen. 2:4–9; Job 38:4–11; John 1:1–5

**1** In the <sup>a</sup>beginning <sup>b</sup>God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>The earth was <sup>a</sup>without form, and void; and darkness <sup>1</sup>was on the face of the deep. <sup>b</sup>And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

<sup>3a</sup>Then God said, <sup>b</sup>“Let there be <sup>c</sup>light”; and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw the light, that *it was* good; and God divided the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the <sup>a</sup>darkness He called Night. <sup>6</sup>So the evening and the morning were the first day.

<sup>6</sup>Then God said, <sup>a</sup>“Let there be <sup>f</sup>firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.” <sup>7</sup>Thus God made the firmament, <sup>a</sup>and divided the waters which *were* under the firmament from the waters which *were* <sup>b</sup>above the firmament; and it was so. <sup>8</sup>And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.

<sup>9</sup>Then God said, <sup>a</sup>“Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and <sup>b</sup>let the dry *land* appear”; and it was so. <sup>10</sup>And God called the dry *land* Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that *it was* good.

<sup>11</sup>Then God said, “Let the earth <sup>a</sup>bring forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed, and <sup>b</sup>the *fruit* tree *that* yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed *is* in itself, on the earth”; and it was so. <sup>12</sup>And the earth brought forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed according to its kind, and the tree *that* yields fruit, whose seed *is* in itself according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good. <sup>13</sup>So the evening and the morning were the third day.

<sup>14</sup>Then God said, “Let there be <sup>a</sup>lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and <sup>b</sup>seasons, and for days and years; <sup>15</sup>and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth”;

<sup>1:1a</sup>Ps. 102:25; Is. 40:21; [John 1:1–3; Heb. 1:10] <sup>b</sup>Gen. 2:4; [Ps. 8:3; 89:11; 90:2]; Is. 44:24; Acts 17:24; Rom. 1:20; [Heb. 1:2; 11:3]; Rev. 4:11 <sup>1:2a</sup>Jer. 4:23 <sup>b</sup>[Gen. 6:3]; Job 26:13; Ps. 33:6; 104:30; Is. 40:13, 14 <sup>1</sup>Words in italic type have been added for clarity. They are not found in the original Hebrew or Aramaic. <sup>1:3a</sup>Ps. 33:6, 9 <sup>b</sup>2 Cor. 4:6 <sup>c</sup>[Heb. 11:3] <sup>1:5a</sup>Job 37:18; Ps. 19:2; 33:6; 74:16; 104:20; 136:5; Jer. 10:12 <sup>1</sup>Lit. *And evening was, and morning was, a day, one.* <sup>1:6a</sup>Job 37:18; Jer. 10:12; 2 Pet. 3:5 <sup>1:7a</sup>Job 38:8–11; Prov. 8:27–29 <sup>b</sup>Ps. 148:4 <sup>1:9a</sup>Job 26:10; Ps. 104:6–9; Prov. 8:29; Jer. 5:22; 2 Pet. 3:5 <sup>b</sup>Ps. 24:1, 2; 33:7; 95:5 <sup>1:11a</sup>Ps. 65:9–13; 104:14; Heb. 6:7 <sup>b</sup>2 Sam. 16:1; Luke 6:44 <sup>1:14a</sup>Deut. 4:19; Ps. 74:16; 136:5–9 <sup>b</sup>Ps. 104:19

**1:1** In the beginning is a thesis statement, which can be paraphrased, “Here is the story of God’s creation of the heavens and the earth.” The focus is on the creation of the material world—the heavens and the earth. **God:** This standard Hebrew term for Deity, *Elohim*, is in the form called the plural of majesty or the plural of intensity. In contrast to the ordinary plural (gods), this plural means “the fullness of Deity” or “God—very God.” Even though the word for God is plural, the verb for **created** is singular. It means “to fashion anew.” This oft-used word in the Bible always has God as its subject. Here, it means that God renewed what was in a chaotic state. God changed chaos into cosmos, disorder into order, emptiness into fullness. **The heavens and the earth** mean “all of creation” or “the cosmos.”

**1:2** The two words **without form . . . void** express one concept—chaos. The earth had been reduced to this state (Jer. 4:23); it was not the way God had first created it (Is. 45:18). **Darkness** is a potent biblical symbol of evil and wrong (Job 3:5; Ps. 143:3; Is. 8:22; John 3:19). The **deep** is a term for the secret places of the waters (see also 7:11); this term sounds enough like the name of the Babylonian goddess Tiamat to remind the ancient reader of the Babylonian story of creation to which this story stands in dramatic contrast. All these images together portray chaos, disaster,

and devastation. From this portrait of utter ruin, God brought an orderly creation. **The Spirit of God was hovering** like a mother stork might hover over her nest—a portent of life to come from the dark, murky depths of the chaos below (the Spirit is described as a dove in Matt. 3:16).

**1:3** **Let there be light:** These words express a principal theme of the Bible: God bringing light into the darkness (see Is. 9:1, 2). Here, God produced physical light. The NT records God sending His Son to be the light of the world (John 8:12). In the end, there will no longer be any darkness at all (Rev. 21:23). **God said it, and it was done: there was light.** His command caused reality.

**1:4** Having examined the light, God declared it to be **good**—a powerful term of God’s blessing.

**1:5** **Day . . . Night:** The naming of these elements of creation is a mark of God’s sovereignty. In the thinking of the peoples of the ancient Middle East, naming something was a mark of power or lordship. For them, names were not merely labels, but descriptions with some force to them. Since the sun was not yet created (vv. 14–19), the **first day** (lit., a day, one) is ambiguous. Some say that the “seven days” is a literary frame on which the story of creation is draped. Others argue for a strict pattern of seven 24-hour days.

**1:6** In biblical usage, the term **firmament** means “heavens.” Literally, it means

“something stretched out, like hammered metal.”

**1:7** **divided the waters:** The notion of upper and lower waters is somewhat mysterious. The language may simply refer to waters gathered in a liquid state and to moisture in the atmosphere. The division of the waters is another of God’s acts in bringing order out of disorder.

**1:9** The gathering of the waters and the separation of the **dry land** are further actions of God in establishing control over the chaos described in v. 2. Each act of separation and distinction brings order out of disorder, form out of formlessness, cosmos out of chaos. Each act also demonstrates the Lord’s power and wisdom (Prov. 8:22–31).

**1:10** Again, naming the creation marks God’s lordship (see v. 5). The naming of the **Earth** in this verse suggests that the term was used in anticipation in v. 2.

**1:11, 12** The broad words **grass, tree, and fruit tree** encompass all plants, shrubs, and trees. The reference to **seed and kind** speaks of the fact that the plant kingdom will continue to reproduce. God not only created plant life; He also set in motion the processes that make plant life reproduce. **1:14, 15** The creation of the sun, moon, and stars is described in general terms in these verses; vv. 16–18 spell out the details. **Lights in the firmament** are luminaries (objects that shine). They produce the division

**God** (Heb. pl. *elohim*) (1:1, 26; Deut. 7:9; Is. 45:18) Strong’s #430 ♦ The standard Hebrew term for God. This word is related to similar words for deity found throughout almost all Semitic languages. The basic meaning is probably “Mighty” or “the Almighty.” In Hebrew, this word often occurs in a form called “the plural of majesty” or “the plural of intensity.” In contrast to a normal plural (that is, “gods,” such as the false gods of 1 Kin. 19:2), the Hebrew uses this plural to mean “The Fullness of Deity” or “God—Very God!” Many Christians point to the plural form of this word as revealing the plural nature of God. God is one, but He is also three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

and it was so. <sup>16</sup>Then God made two great <sup>1</sup>lights: the <sup>a</sup>greater light to rule the day, and the <sup>b</sup>lesser light to rule the night. He made <sup>c</sup>the stars also. <sup>17</sup>God set them in the firmament of the <sup>a</sup>heavens to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup>and to <sup>a</sup>rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that *it was* good. <sup>19</sup>So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup>Then God said, “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living <sup>1</sup>creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the <sup>2</sup>firmament of the heavens.” <sup>21</sup>So <sup>a</sup>God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good. <sup>22</sup>And God blessed them, saying, <sup>a</sup>“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” <sup>23</sup>So the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup>Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, *each* according to

its kind”; and it was so. <sup>25</sup>And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good.

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, <sup>a</sup>“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; <sup>b</sup>let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over <sup>1</sup>all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” <sup>27</sup>So God created man <sup>a</sup>in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; <sup>b</sup>male and female He created them. <sup>28</sup>Then God blessed them, and God said to them, <sup>a</sup>“Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and <sup>b</sup>subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that <sup>1</sup>moves on the earth.”

<sup>1:16</sup><sup>a</sup>Ps. 136:8 <sup>b</sup>Deut. 17:3; Ps. 8:3 <sup>c</sup>Deut. 4:19; Job 38:7; Is. 40:26

<sup>1</sup>luminaries. <sup>1:17</sup><sup>a</sup>Gen. 15:5; Jer. 33:20, 25 <sup>1:18</sup><sup>a</sup>Jer. 31:35

<sup>1:20</sup><sup>1</sup>souls <sup>2</sup>expanse <sup>1:21</sup><sup>a</sup>Ps. 104:25–28 <sup>1:22</sup><sup>a</sup>Gen. 8:17

<sup>1:26</sup><sup>a</sup>Gen. 9:6; Ps. 100:3; Eccl. 7:29; [Eph. 4:24]; James 3:9 <sup>b</sup>Gen.

9:2; Ps. 8:6–8 <sup>1</sup>Syr. *all the wild animals of* <sup>1:27</sup><sup>a</sup>Gen. 5:2; 1 Cor. 11:7

<sup>b</sup>Matt. 19:4; [Mark 10:6–8] <sup>1:28</sup><sup>a</sup>Gen. 9:1, 7; Lev. 26:9 <sup>b</sup>1 Cor. 9:27

<sup>1</sup>moves about on

between the day and night. **signs and seasons:** Some have mistakenly viewed these words as a biblical basis for astrology. The signs in this case relate to phases of the moon and the relative positions of stars that mark the passage of time from the vantage point of earth. The two words form a pair that may be translated *seasonal signs*.

<sup>1:16</sup> As in vv. 14, 15, the term for *lights* can mean “luminaries.” The word can either designate the sun, which emits light, or the moon, which reflects light. He made the stars also: This is a remarkable statement. In the ancient Middle East, other religions worshiped, deified, and mystified the stars. Israel’s neighbors revered the stars and looked to them for guidance. In contrast, the biblical creation story gives the stars only the barest mention, as though the writer shrugged and said, “And, oh, yes. He also made the stars.” Such a statement showed great contempt for ancient Babylonian astrology (see Ps. 29; 93).

<sup>1:17</sup> God set them: Interestingly, the sun and moon are not named here, though they are clearly intended. The principal issue throughout these verses is that God alone is in control.

<sup>1:21</sup> The verb for *created* is the same one used in v. 1 (see v. 27, the creation of man). *According to its kind* suggests the capability to reproduce themselves (see v. 12). God not only made the living creatures, but He gave them the power to propagate and to proliferate, to fill the air and the seas in great numbers and in wonderful variety.

<sup>1:22</sup> God blessed them: The first use of this important phrasing in the Bible (see 1:28; 2:3; 12:2, 3), and it is used of fish and birds!

<sup>1:24</sup> The expression *living creature* contains the word sometimes used for the soul, but the word can also mean “life,” “being,” “living thing,” or “person,” depending on the context. The same phrase

is used for man in 2:7. *cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth:* Three sweeping categories, like those of vv. 11, 20, make the point that God created all living things.

<sup>1:25</sup> God saw that it was good: The sixth time that this phrasing is used (see 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21). Everything that God had made so far was good.

<sup>1:26</sup> Let Us make emphasizes the majesty of the speaker and allows for the later revelation of the Trinity (see 1:7; Matt. 28:19). The *Us* cannot refer to the angels that are present with God because man is made in the image of God, not of the angels. In *Our image:* What is the image of God in man? The traditional view is that God’s image includes certain moral, ethical, and intellectual abilities. A more recent view, based on Hebrew grammar and the knowledge of the ancient Middle East, interprets the phrase as meaning “Let Us make man as our image” (the Hebrew preposition in this phrase can be translated *as*). God placed humankind as living symbols of Himself on earth to represent His reign. This interpretation fits well with the command that follows—to reign over all that God has made. *According to Our likeness:* This phrase draws attention to the preceding figure of speech. Since God is Spirit (John 4:24), there can be no “image” or “likeness” of Him in the normal sense of these words. Indeed, image-making was later strongly prohibited because of the clear ties it had with idolatry (see Ex. 20:4–6). We may not make images of God for He has already done so! *We are His images; it is we who are in His likeness.* This is the reason God values people so much: We are made to reflect His majesty on earth. *have dominion:* Rule as God’s regent. That is, people are to rule as God would—wisely and prudently.

<sup>1:27</sup> So God created man: The third time the verb for *create* is used in ch. 1 (see vv. 1, 21); here it is used three times. The

language of vv. 26, 28 is elevated prose; this verse is pure poetry. The 12 words of the original Hebrew are arranged in three lines that have their own poetic repetition and cadence. The term for man is likely associated with the term for the red earth. Here the word is generic, including *male and female*. These words are sexual. Some have thought that the “discovery” of human sexuality was the forbidden fruit of ch. 3. However, these words indicate that human sexuality was a part of the original creation (5:2). Although the misuse of human sexuality is soundly condemned in Scripture (Lev. 18), its proper use is celebrated (2:24, 25; Song). Verses 26–28 include the woman no less than the man in the story of creation.

<sup>1:28</sup> God blessed them: God’s smile; the warmth of His pleasure (1:22; 2:3; 9:1; 12:2, 3). God delighted in what He had made (Prov. 8:30, 31). The word translated *subdue* means “bring into bondage.” This harsh term is used elsewhere of military conquest (Zech. 9:15) and of God subduing our iniquities (Mic. 7:19). As a king sets off to war to conquer a territory, so humans are told by the Great King to subdue the earth and rule it. Why this need to subjugate the earth? There are at least four possibilities: (1) Sin would ruin the earth, and people would have to expend great effort to live there (see 3:17–19). (2) Satan would defy the will of God and make all good efforts difficult. (3) The earth left to itself would not remain good. Instead, God planned that people would need to manage and control it. (4) The beauty of the earth was only in the garden that God planted (see 2:8); the rest of the earth would be hostile. Whatever the case, *subdue* does not mean “destroy” or “ruin.” It does mean to “act as managers who have the authority to run everything as God planned.” This command applies equally to male and female.



<sup>29</sup>And God said, “See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; <sup>a</sup>to you it shall be for food. <sup>30</sup>Also, to <sup>a</sup>every beast of the earth, to every <sup>b</sup>bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which *there is* <sup>1</sup>life, I have given every green herb for food”; and it was so. <sup>31</sup>Then <sup>a</sup>God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was*

very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

**2** Thus the heavens and the earth, and <sup>a</sup>all the host of them, were finished. <sup>2a</sup>And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. <sup>3</sup>Then God <sup>a</sup>blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

<sup>4a</sup>This is the <sup>1</sup>history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, <sup>5</sup>before any <sup>a</sup>plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not <sup>b</sup>caused

**heavens** (Heb. *shamayim*) (1:1, 8, 9; 2:1; Ps. 2:4) Strong’s #8064 ♦ The Hebrew word for *heavens* may refer to either the physical heavens, the sky or the atmosphere of earth (2:1, 4, 19), or to the dwelling place of God (Ps. 14:2), the spiritual heaven. The expression is probably derived from a word meaning “to be high, lofty.” To describe God as living in the heavens is to describe His exalted position over all people. The physical heavens testify to God’s glorious position and also to His creative genius (Ps. 19:1, 6).

1:29<sup>a</sup>Gen. 9:3; Ps. 104:14, 15 1:30<sup>a</sup>Ps. 145:15 <sup>b</sup>Job 38:41 <sup>1a</sup>living soul 1:31<sup>a</sup>[Ps. 104:24; 1Tim. 4:4] 2:1<sup>a</sup>Ps. 33:6 2:2<sup>a</sup>Ex. 20:9–11; 31:17; Heb. 4:4, 10 2:3<sup>a</sup>[Is. 58:13] 2:4<sup>a</sup>Gen. 1:1; Ps. 90:1, 2 <sup>1</sup>Heb. *toledoth*, lit. *generations* 2:5<sup>a</sup>Gen. 1:11, 12 <sup>b</sup>Gen. 7:4; Job 5:10; 38:26–28

1:29 Many suggest that Adam and Eve were vegetarians because God gave them every herb and every tree.

1:31 This is the seventh use of the term good in the creation story (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). It is only one of several key terms that are used in multiples of seven in this text. 2:1 While mention is made of the heavens, the focus in the first chapter has been on the earth. Although the earth is not the physical center of the universe, it is the center of God’s great creative work.

2:2 God did not rest because of fatigue, but because of His accomplishment. God is never weary (Is. 40:28, 29). The verb translated as *rested* is related to the word for Sabbath, which means “rest.” Many assume that the basic meaning of the

Sabbath is worship, but this is not the case (Ex. 20:9–11; Deut. 5:12–14). By God’s blessed inactivity on this seventh day, He showed that He was satisfied with the work He had done.

2:3 God blessed the birds and fish (1:22), humans (1:28), and now the seventh day (Saturday). He sanctified it; He made it holy. Thus, from the beginning of time, God placed special value on a certain day of the week.

2:4 The term translated as *history* is found in ten significant passages in Genesis (here and 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). The term may be translated *family histories* and is a major marker of the different sections of the Book of Genesis. In the day means “when.” The LORD God is

a significant new term for God. The word translated as *God* is the same word as in 1:1. The word translated as “LORD” is the proper name for God, Yahweh (or Jehovah; see Ex. 3:14, 15). The God of ch. 1 and the LORD God of ch. 2 are the same.

2:5 The order of events in the second creation story is somewhat different from the first account (1:1–2:3). Conditions were radically different from those we now know and understand. The phrase *not caused it to rain* anticipates the story of the Flood (see chs. 6–9). Here was an element of creation that was still in process. *man to till the ground*: The Hebrew term for man sounds similar to the term for ground (1:26; 2:7).

## ◀ GOD AS CREATOR ▶

“God created the heavens and the earth” (1:1). These words form one of the Bible’s principal assertions about the material world—that God created it all.

The first two chapters of Genesis present two complementary accounts of creation (Ps. 104 and Prov. 8 present two additional accounts). Genesis 1 pictures God in sublime terms—grand and awesome. The Hebrew term used for deity in this section (*Elohim*) speaks of God’s majesty, sovereignty, and awesome power. With a mere word, God spoke the entire universe into existence. When He finished, He called every part of His creation “very good” (1:31).

Genesis 2, on the other hand, presents a more personal picture of creation. It focuses on the creation of man and woman—the only beings in creation who reflect the very image of God. In this section, God’s personal name (*Yahweh*, or LORD) is used rather than His title, “God.” This is because God personally shaped Adam from the dust of the earth, breathing life into him, and forming Eve from Adam’s flesh and bone. Moreover, the section depicts God placing Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden and interacting with them.

Of course, these two chapters are not written in terms of modern science. But neither are they written in what would have passed for science in ancient times. If the Bible had been written in the “scientific” language of its day, it would be little more than a relic today. Had it been written in the scientific language of the Middle Ages, it would have been a mystery to its first readers and nonsense to us. Had it been written in the scientific language of our own day, it would have been unintelligible to prior generations—and to be sure, a relic in future years.

These first chapters of Genesis reveal God’s identity as Creator in language that makes sense to every sort of audience. The chapters spoke first to a people on the move, at the dawn of Hebrew history. Over the ages, they have spoken to ancient and medieval peoples. And today, they speak to people from all backgrounds. The modern person sometimes wonders why the language is not more precise. Yet these chapters do not aim at precision—their aim is clarity concerning one certain truth: *God created the heavens and the earth.* ♦