

Genesis 1

The first chapter of the Bible presents the creation of the world within a six-day week of creation; the seventh day will be presented in chapter two. This first verse states God created everything that was created. The rest of the chapter will give details of that creation in general terms (the “heavens” in verse 8, the “earth” in verse 10) while chapter two will focus on the creation of man and woman.

TRANSLATION - 1:1-2:

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. **2** The earth was a wasteland and a void and darkness [was]¹ over the face of the deep. Now the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

WORDS:

“God” (*Elohim*) is the most significant, widely used word in the OT, the second most used noun. *Elohim* is found 2,602 times.² The word can also be translated “gods” as well as “judges” as human representatives of God in certain contexts (cf. Exo. 22:8-9). While the word could mean “the God of gods,” Biblical theology is entirely monotheistic. This is the ordinary word for God, used in a generic sense. “Heavens” and “earth,” together, can denote the universe as a whole, as Hebrew does not have a word for “universe.” The word translated “deep” (vs 2) is from the same word family as “wasteland.”

“Wasteland” is used twenty times in the OT, especially by Isaiah. “Void” is only used twice; here and Jeremiah 4:23. Some see the two terms expressing one idea (hendiadys): “a waste-less void.” They are an example of a paronomasia, a rhetorical device in which two words are said together that sound alike, rhythmically. Written out, the phrase would be: “*tohu wabohu*” and one can see how the sounds are similar. “Darkness” is used 80 times. “Spirit” (*ruach*) is used 378 times, meaning “breath,” “wind,” or “spirit,” often referring to the Spirit of God but sometimes man’s spirit, or evil spirit. The verb “hovering” is found also in Deuteronomy 32:11 and Jeremiah 23:9.

GRAMMAR:

Verse 2 is tightly bound to verse 1 so that there is no time frame between the two verses. “Hovering” is a *piel* participle. Typically, the *piel* indicates intensive action but this verb does not carry that connotation.

COMMENTS:

For Moses, there is no discussion of an origin for God. He is and has always been. There is no hint of other gods, equal to Him or subservient. While “Spirit” (*ruach*) can be translated as “spirit” or “wind,” here we suggest that it refers to the Spirit of God. Moses would not have understood the idea of a Trinity, but he did understand there was a separate divine being who was behind the design of the tabernacle, referred to as the “Spirit of God” (Exo. 31:3; 35:31; cf. Num. 11:17, 25, 26, 29; 24:2; 27:18). While God will progressively reveal Himself to mankind, culminating in Jesus Christ, this is the Spirit of God, as well as the Father, after whose image and likeness mankind is created (vss 26-27). Perhaps the “hovering,” as it denotes the action of a bird (cf. Deut. 32:11), as well as the dove from Noah’s days (Gen. 8:10), are behind the imagery of the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus in the form of a dove (Mark 1:10).

¹ I have added bracketed words to smooth the translation.

² Word counts are from Miles V. Van Pelt and Gary D. Pratico, *The Vocabulary Guide to Biblical Hebrew*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 2003.

The suggestion that some have made that the “deep” (*tehom*) is linguistically related to the Babylonian god *Tiamat* and therefore, we have God battling “Chaos” is baseless. There is no suggestion here that God is fighting, much less having to bring under control, Chaos or any other god.³ Simply because pagans personified the ocean does not mean the Hebrews did the same. Since God is before “the beginning,” it is obvious that God created time and is before time, and is outside of time. When time comes to an end, God will still exist as He is not susceptible to time.

Throughout the account of creation, we see a Creator who is knowledgeable, powerful, and wise. He creates a world that is interdependent, illustrated in our concept of a food web or food chain. All the cycles of nature illustrate the wisdom and power of God. Environmentalists often remind us that this world is intricate and tied together tightly.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Man has been created in this text but we have not yet been introduced to Adam as a personality so there is nothing at this point to consider relative to application.

Moses’ contemporaries - The Israelites coming out of Egypt are being reminded of the power and sovereignty of Jehovah God. Additionally, they will be required to keep the Sabbath (Exo. 20:11) as well as other days and seasons which are based on the creation week.

Later Hebrew writers - The OT writers consistently point to God as Creator of the world. In some contexts, reflection on the creation is portrayed in poetic terms (Psa. 33:6, 9; 104; 136; 148; Prov. 8:22-31; Job 26:3, 7; 38; Isa. 23:11; 45:7, 18; Jer. 4:23-27). In Psalm 90:2, the psalmist will say that God is before time and will exist after time concludes; He is eternal. Job 26:13 says that the Spirit beautified the heavens.

Christians - The NT writers also consistently portray God as Creator (Acts 17:24; Heb. 11:3). Of course, John will use the opening words of Genesis to introduce his account of the life of Christ (1:1). Since God *created* all things, He Himself is not created. He is also independent of all things, including man.

TRANSLATION - 1:3-5:

3 And God said, “Let light be,” and there was light. **4** And God saw the light that [it was] good and God divided the light from the darkness. **5** And God called the light ‘day’ and the darkness He called ‘night.’ And it was evening and it was morning, Day One.

WORDS:

“Light” (vs 3) is found 120 times; the verb to “shine,” 44 times.

GRAMMAR:

“Let be” is a jussive (Jussive), an imperative form. Jussives (imperatives) are found throughout the text. What this shows is the power of the spoken word of God. The verb “divided” is a *hiphil* imperfect. The *hiphil* is causative. God is actively *causing* the creation to happen.

COMMENTS:

God does not create the sun until Day Four. What type of light this was is unknowable. God certainly had options at His disposal. What we know, however, is that God created light on

³ Harris, R. Laird, “תְּהוֹם,” pages 965-966 in *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*, ed. by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke. Chicago: Moody, 1980. See also Michael A. Grisanti, “תְּהוֹם,” pages 275-277 in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Vol. 4. Ed. by Willem A. VanGemeren. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.

Day One to set the pattern for His creative activity happening every 24 hours. He will later command Israel as well as Christians to celebrate one or more days as unique and holy. Here, God lays the groundwork for the division of time. The creation days explained as “evening and morning” could be the reason Jews reckon their days from sunset to sunset.

Since God “called” or “named, then He has complete sovereignty, authority, and control over what He creates.

APPLICATION:

Later Hebrew writers - “Darkness” is usually associated with moral or spiritual blindness but in Isaiah 45:7, Isaiah says that God created darkness. Everything is under God’s control. The darkness that comes over the earth every 24 hours is a good thing; it allows rest and refreshment that all living things, human, animals, and plants, need.

Christians - Just as John set the life of Christ in the context of the creation (1:1), he also identifies Jesus as the spiritual light needed to guide mankind (1:4-5). Paul will utilize the same metaphor, applying it to the gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 4:1-6).

TRANSLATION - 1:6-8:

6 And God said, “Let be an expanse inside the waters” and it was dividing waters from waters. **7** And God made the expanse and divided the waters which [were] below the expanse from the waters which [were] above the expanse and it was so. **8** And God called the expanse ‘heaven’ and it was evening and it was morning, Second Day.

WORDS:

The “expanse” is found in seventeen verses, mainly in Gen. 1 and in Eze. 1. The word could be understood as a solid surface as if beaten like metal (Num 17:3; Job 37:18). It can be translated “sky.” The Old English word firmament comes from the Latin translation *firmamentum*. It is reading too much into the word in this context to believe Moses and his contemporaries thought there was a solid mass in the sky. In fact, birds fly in the sky (1:20), so it could not have been understood as a solid mass. What it suggests is a division between the waters above from the waters below. “Made” (vs 7) is a different verb from “created” (vs 1; *bara*) but the two words are used interchangeably in this context, although God is always the subject of the verb “created.”

GRAMMAR:

“Was dividing” is a *hiphil* participle. The finite form “divided” is also *hiphil*.⁴

COMMENTS:

There is no struggle for God to separate anything in His creation. It is all done by the power of His word.

APPLICATION:

Christians - In 2 Peter 3:5, the apostle will point to creation, saying the world existed by the word of God and the earth was formed “out of water and by water.”

TRANSLATION - 1:9-13:

9 And God said, “Let there be gathered the waters below the heavens to one place and let be seen the dry land” and it was so. **10** And God called the dry land “earth” and the place of waters He called “seas” and God saw that [it was] good. **11** And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, herbs making seeds, fruit trees making fruit of its kind which [has] its seed in

⁴ See the comment about the *hiphil* on “Grammar” under 1:3-5.

itself on the earth and it was so. **12** And the earth brought forth vegetation, herbs making seed after its kind, and the tree making fruit which [had] its seed in itself after its kind and God saw that [it was] good. **13** And it was evening and it was morning, Third Day.

WORDS:

“Sprout” is also found in Joel 2:22. The verb “let sprout” is a cognate word with “vegetation:” “let sprout sprouts” (literally). “Seed” will become a thematic word through the book of Genesis; it is used 59 times only in this book. The word translated “vegetation” (1:11-12) could refer to its own flora of plant so that God creates three kinds of plants: vegetation, herbs, and fruit trees. Or, Moses could use “vegetation” as a generic term and only intend to mention two flora: seed-bearing plants and fruit trees.

GRAMMAR:

“Let be gathered” and “Let be seen” are *niphal* jussives, which is a passive imperative. “Let sprout” is a *hiphil* jussive.⁵ The phrase “herbs making seeds” translates a participle from the “seed” cognate family, translated literally it means, “seeding seed.” “Brought forth” is a *hiphil*.

COMMENTS:

Some pagan myths suggested man was created to provide food for his gods. Here, God provides food for His human creation.

APPLICATION:

Later Hebrew writers - Science and Scripture agree that the world is uniquely designed for God’s human creation. Isaiah will reflect on the creation and write that God did not create the earth to be a “waste place,” but formed it to be inhabited (45:18).

TRANSLATION - 1:14-19:

14 And God said, “Let be luminaries in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night and they will be for signs and for seasons and for days and for years. **15** And they will be for luminaries in the expanse of the heavens and to shine on the earth and it was so. **16** And God made two large luminaries, the large luminary to rule the day and the small luminary to rule the night, and [He made] the stars. **17** And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to shine on the earth, **18** to rule the day and the night and to divide the light from the darkness and God saw that [it was] good. **19** And it was evening and it was morning, Fourth Day.

WORDS:

“Luminaries” are found eighteen times, most in Gen-Num (15). “Signs” are found 79 times. “Seasons” translates “appointed times.” In this context, we understand it to refer to “seasons,” being associated with “days” and “years.” “To rule” (vs 16) means to have dominion over a realm. The verb is used 81 times.

COMMENTS:

While the pagans worshiped the sun, moon, and stars as embodiments of different deities (cf. Deut. 4:19; Jer. 44:17-19, 25), again, in Genesis, they are simply creations by God, spoken into existence, to serve the benefit of man, “to shine on the earth.” It could be that “signs” and “seasons” are another hendiadys, two terms used to convey one idea: “signs of times.” Some have also suggested that Moses avoids the Hebrew words for sun (*shemesh*) and

⁵ See the comment about the *hiphil* on “Grammar” under 1:3-5.

moon (*yarih*), instead calling them the “large luminary” and “small luminary,” to avoid any hint of paganism as those entities were worshiped by some cultures.

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - Having told Israel that the sun, moon, and stars are made by God for the purpose of serving man, the Law of Moses implemented the death penalty on those who would so worship (Deut. 17:2-5).

Later Hebrew writers - Israel will succumb to the temptation to worship the heavenly bodies, a behavior which King Josiah will stop (2 Kings 23:5). Job comments that God has created the heavenly bodies (Job 9:7), even the constellations (9:9). The psalmist refers to the “ruling” of the sun, by day, and the moon, by night, as being a reflection of the lovingkindness of God. Isaiah echoes Job and Moses (40:25-26). Jeremiah will point to the faithfulness of the day-night cycle as an illustration of God’s faithfulness relative to His covenant with David (33:19-26). Solomon will also point to the sunrise and sunset to illustrate how consistent life is (Ecc. 1:5).

Christians - Paul reflects on the creation of Genesis 1 in 1 Corinthians 15:39-41 as he considers the difference in nature between the physical body and the spiritual body of the resurrection.

TRANSLATION - 1:20-22:

20 And God said, “Let the waters swarm with the living, breathing swarmer and let the bird fly over the earth over the face of the expanse of the heavens.” **21** And God created the great sea animals and every breathing, creeping life which swarm the waters after their kind, every bird with the wing after its kind and God saw that [it was] good. **22** And God blessed them saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters among the waters and let the bird multiply in the earth.” **23** And it was evening and it was morning, Fifth Day.

WORDS:

The noun “swarmer” is cognate with the verb “swarm.” The word we translate “breathing” is the word *nephesh* which refers to the “soul” in human contexts. It is used 757 times and carries the idea of life. It can be translated breath, craving, soul, life, or person. In limited contexts, it can be translated “neck” or “throat.” “Living” refers to something living. In Hebrew, “bird” and “fly” are cognate words: “let the flyer fly...”

“Sea animals” (vs 21; *tannim*) is found 15 times and has been translated “whale,” serpent, or dragon.⁶ The word is simply generic. The verb “to bless” (*barak*) is found 327 times in the OT. It is a key term in Genesis, used 65 times. “Be fruitful” is found 29 times; “multiply,” 229 times, “fill,” 252 times.

GRAMMAR:

The verb “let swarm,” as most other verbs in the creation account, is a jussive, portraying the imperative mood. “Let fly” is a *piel* jussive, normally an intensive imperative. The verb “be fruitful” is from the same family as the “fruit” tree. “Let multiply” is also a jussive.

COMMENTS:

Animals are said, here, to have “breath” (*nephesh*) the word used elsewhere to refer to human *souls*. The word distinguishes what is living and breathes, humans and animals, from what does not live and breathe. Animals are not made in the image of God (see 1:24-31) and are never said to inhabit the eternal home. In Canaanite myth, the great sea animals (*tannim*) were rivals to the gods. In Genesis, they are simply animals created by God.

⁶ Since the word “dragon” was not created until the 13th century A. D., the modern conception is likely something different than what Moses has in mind.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Moses reflects the power of creation in Exodus 1:7, which describes the increase of the Israelites while they are in Egypt. In that verse, he uses the same verbs from Genesis 1: "were fruitful," "swarmed," and "multiplied."

Later Hebrew writers - Isaiah pictures God slaying a leviathan, another animal that cannot be positively identified, in Isaiah 27:1. It is identified as a "sea creature" (*tannim*). In 51:9, Isaiah identifies another, now unknown, animal as "rahab," a *tannim*. Again, in Psalms 74:13-14, God is pictured as crushing the heads of the "sea animals" (*tannim*) and the leviathan is listed there as well. In Job 7:12, Job asks if he is a "sea animal" (*tannim*) such that God could set a guard over him.

Christians - All living creatures were created to reproduce "after their kind" (ten times in Gen. 1) which is consistent with what we know from genetics and the law of biogenesis. Mankind has never seen that fact violated which shows that Genesis is consistent with science; evolution is not.

TRANSLATION - 1:24-31:

24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth breathing life after its kind, livestock, and creeping thing and the animal of earth after its kind," and it was so. **25** And God made the animal of the earth after its kind and the livestock after its kind, every creeping thing of the land after its kind and God saw that [it was] good.

26 And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let him rule the fish of the sea, the bird of the heavens, and livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing creeping on the earth." **27** And God created the man in His image, in the likeness of God He created him, male and female, He created them. **28** And God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subjugate it and rule it: the fish of the sea, the bird of the heavens, and over every life creeping on the earth." **29** And God said, "Behold, I give to you all the herb making seed which [is] on the face of all the earth and every tree which [is] on it. The fruit tree making seed for you let it be for food, **30** and every life of the earth and every bird of the heavens and every creeping thing on the earth which [is] on it, breathing life, all green herb for food and it was so." **31** And God saw all which He made and behold [it was] very good and it was evening and it was morning, Sixth Day.

WORDS:

"Land" (vs 25) is used for the first time here (out of 222 times) and will give its name to the first man, "Adam." "Livestock" (*behemah*; 190 times) might be domesticated animals but could mean animals in general, even wild animals. The "behemoth" of Job's book (40:15) is the plural form of this word; translated, it would be "the best of beasts!" The *behemoth* is not a mythological creature since God affirms that He had made it (40:15). The same thing is true of the phrase "animal of earth."

"Image" (vs 26) is found fifteen times. It can refer to an image, a figure, a replica, or a statue (as in Dan. 2 & 3). "Likeness" (25 times) can be translated "shape," "model," or "pattern." The verb "rule" here, different from the prior one, is found 22 times and means to "tread, subdue, or rule over." It can also mean to "teach." "Male" is found 82 times; "female," 22 times. The verb to "subjugate" (15x) carries the idea of "humiliating, bringing into bondage, subduing." The exclamation "behold" is found 1,061 times!

GRAMMAR:

"Let produce" and "Let rule" are jussives. "Let us make" is a cohortative, first person plural, which expresses a wish, request, or command.

COMMENTS:

If “breathing” (*nephesh*) separates living organisms from inanimate objects (vs 20; even plants are not said to have *nephesh*), humans are separated from animals by being made in the image of God (*imago Dei*). Since man was made *to rule*, then all that is necessary to rule is contained in the concept of “image” and “likeness.”

God is spirit (John 4:24) and Jesus says a spirit does not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). If God were physical, then He would be representable in a physical way. Our physical characteristics are related to our life that is limited in space and time. Since God does not have such limitations and He is spirit, then man is not *physically* after God’s image and likeness. Passages, then, which assert physical qualities of God must be understood as anthropomorphisms.

Man has the ability to communicate, evaluate, decide, plan, and teach future generations. Additionally, man is a moral being with the ability to feel and experience emotions deeper and more complex than animals, including decisions of moral right and wrong. The Bible will further portray man with the ability to have a relationship with God and to worship Him since the purpose of man’s creation is for him to live with God in heaven throughout eternity. The text does not say man *reflects* the image of God; it says man is made *in* the image of God. These things being true, man, in sharp contrast to animals, is a representative of God on earth. Jesus will clarify and purify that vision of man as the image of God when He comes to earth (cf. Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).

When God says, “Let *us* make...” (vs 26), we can understand the plural in one of several ways:

- (1) God could refer to His heavenly court of angelic beings (cf. Job 38).
- (2) God could refer to the Godhead, which would include Jesus Christ (cf. Col. 1:16), and the (Holy) Spirit of God (cf. 1:2).
- (3) There is more than one God. “God” could be translated “gods.”
- (4) God is speaking majestically, similar to how newspaper editorials will use the word “we.”
- (5) God is deliberating with Himself.

We do not accept option #1 since nowhere do the Scriptures hint that man is made in the image of angels nor that angels were involved in the creation. Genesis 1 strongly emphasizes the creative power of the only God. Furthermore, the verbs related to “make” are all singular verbs. Old Testament theology is adamantly opposed to option #3. Options #4 and #5 are possibilities (although deliberation in 18:17 is first person singular) but not probabilities. As we pointed out from verse 2, Moses knew of the Spirit of God as a separate Being in the Godhead, even if he did not have a concept of a Trinity. Further divine revelation will clarify that the Godhead was involved in creation.

God created man, a generic word for mankind. Moses writes that “man” is divided into two genders: male and female. Both reflect the image of God; both reflect the likeness of God. In their inherent nature, male and female are equal. Not only that but mankind also serves as the source of all nationalities and races, making them all equal in their nature as representatives of God on earth. Again, in contrast to other religions, royalty is not made in the likeness of God; all humanity is. In contrast to the sexuality of man, and the sexuality of pagan gods, there is no sexuality in the true God. He is consistently portrayed in masculine terms but He has no female consort or counterpart.

If the creation of nature does not reveal a God of love, the creation of man in His image certainly does. Man is designed for relationships and to worship, which teaches us that God is a personal God, who desires relationships. The basis of man’s relationship with God is love (1

John 4:8-12). Additionally, God created man to create after his own likeness and image (cf. Gen. 5:3). God is worthy to be worshiped because He is the creator of all things.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - There are allusions or echoes of 1:26-28 later in Genesis, reminding Moses' audience that they were to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth: 9:1, 6-7; 12:2-3; 17:2, 6; 22:17-18; 26:3-4, 24; 28:3-4, 13-14; 35:11-12; 47:27; 48:3-4. In 5:1-3, Moses suggests that the image and likeness of God are continually found in humanity, despite the sin of chapter 3. Moses' contemporaries will experience that divine blessing even while they are in Egypt: Exodus 1:7, 12, 20; Num. 23:10-11.

Man is made in the image of God, therefore man should not make God in his image (idols; Exo. 20:4-5). Since animals are created by God, and for man's use, Moses commands Israel not to worship the animals, nor God in the image of an animal (Deut. 4:17), nor engage in sexual relations with an animal (Exo. 22:19; Lev. 18:23).

Later Hebrew writers - As we have said above, later Hebrew writers support the account of God's creation of man, in His own image. Psalm 8 is a beautiful poetic reflection on man as the pinnacle of God's creation (cf. Psalms 33, 148). Isaiah 45:12 affirms the miraculous creation of man. Zechariah 12:1 reminds his audience that God forms the spirit of man in him. Job 33:4 says the Spirit made man.

Christians - Paul reaffirms the creation of all men by Jehovah God in Acts 17:24-29. The creation of man in the image of God is found in 1 Corinthians 11:7-9 and 15:49. Christ is the perfect image of God (Col. 1:15; Heb. 2:6-15, which quotes Psalm 8 to this effect). In Christ, man can reflect the image of God as he should (Col. 3:9-10). All men are made in the image of God which, James says, should keep us from speaking evil of one another (3:7-10). The equality of man and woman is reestablished in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28) but that equality does not extend to the roles in the home and the church which God has set down (Eph. 5:22ff; 1 Tim. 2:11-15). In the latter passage, Paul points to the *order* of creation: man first, then woman, to substantiate male leadership in the church.

APPENDIX ON THE AGE OF THE EARTH

The world is composed of chemical elements. Elements can break down over time. That time is unique to each element and it is called the "half-life." That is the time for one element to break *half-way down* into the other element. The first element is called the "parent" element and the second element is called the "daughter" element.

First, evolutionists have to *assume* that the rate of break-down has been constant since the world began.

Second, evolutionists have to *assume* that the rocks have not *gained* or *lost* either "parent" or "daughter" element (except through the decay process) throughout those years. We do not know what effect the universal flood of Noah's day had on the earth. That is something we will *never* know.

Third, the biggest and weakest *assumption* of evolutionists is that there would be no "daughter element" in the rock *at the beginning*. However, we do *not know* what the world looked like when God created it during that first week. That is something we will *never* know.

Fourth, evolutionists must *assume* that the earth is old enough for some of these elements to break down *anyway*. Could it be that when God created certain rocks that they were, in fact, *half way through* their decay process?

Creation scientists, and evolutionary scientists who will be honest with the facts, have shown and know that none of these assumptions can be proven.

Do not let so-called “dating techniques” shake your faith in the Scriptures. We do *not* know what rocks, or the universe for that matter, looked like the day God created them. Nor do we know what effects the destruction of the world at the flood of Noah would have had on rocks and the decay process. The text of Genesis 1 is a tightly written text that leaves no room for millions, much less billions, of years. As it stands, Genesis 1 teaches God spoke the world into existence out of nothing, *creatio ex nihilo*.