

# LIFE BIBLE STUDY

## SESSION OBJECTIVE: GENESIS 1:1-2:3

To understand the origin and order of creation.

## How Did I Get Here?

The question of the origin of life is one of the most important and controversial questions today. How did we get here? Where did everything come from? How did all of this happen? For an overwhelming majority of the history of time, people have reasoned that something or someone must have made all of this. No one



stumbles upon a house and reasons that it must have just happened, without cause. Yet, in the last 150 years or so, skepticism has risen to an all-time high regarding a creation event. Many theories have emerged from the secular community seeking to understand how all of this could have happened apart from a higher power. Some theories showcase the cutting edge of science and technology, while others sound a little more like science fiction. For Christians, we find our answers to this question (and many other questions, for that matter) in the *Book of Genesis*. Genesis chapter 1 explains how creation was formed in an orderly and purposeful fashion. It explains why, out of the myriad of species, human beings reign over them all. It explains God's original intent for how creation was supposed to operate.

## In the Beginning

Genesis is the first of five books that comprise *the Torah*, the law portion of the Jewish *Tanakh* (Old Testament). The Torah is also sometimes referred to as the book of Moses in both Jewish literature and the New Testament. While Genesis does not explicitly claim that Moses was the author, it is reasonable considering the external evidence. The original name of this book is just the first word in the Hebrew (בְּרֵאשִׁית) which means, "In the beginning." However, the English title *Genesis* is derived from the Greek translation of

the original Hebrew text (Gen. 2:4 is likely its source). Both names sufficiently describe the task that the book sets out to accomplish. Genesis seeks to go all the way back to the beginning, when creation and even time began. Moses tells us what event set things in motion: “God created.”

### ***A FORMLESS CREATION***

Moses tells us that God’s creative act was undeveloped in the beginning, as the earth was, “formless and void” (Gen. 1:2). Earth, in other words had not taken its full, mature shape, and it was not yet filled with anything. It might be tempting to think of an empty field or forest, but keep in mind, empty means totally empty of everything. Vegetation had not yet been created, for that doesn’t happen until the third day (Gen. 1:11-12).

### ***THE SPIRIT OF GOD***

Verse 2 poses the first real interpretative challenge for those of us who are familiar with New Testament theology. Moses says, “and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the water.” The Spirit of God rings immediately of *the Holy Spirit*. This is not necessarily wrong, however, caution must be used. The person of the Holy Spirit had not yet come at this point in the way we know Him. The Hebrew word here (רוח) means Spirit, but it can also mean wind or breath. Perhaps the way the Hebrews understood this was that, “the breath of God was hovering over the waters.” God’s breath, after all, is what ultimately brings life to mankind (Gen. 2:7). It does not go without saying that the Triune God was working creation. The Apostle Paul tells us that it was Jesus who was responsible for creation (Col. 1:16-17). So, perhaps the breath of God was the way that the Hebrews understood creation unfolding, but in God’s fullest revelation, we understand that the Triune God (the Father, the Son, and the Spirit) was at work.

## **The Days of Creation**

Chapter 1 describes the creation week in 7 literal days. Some have suggested that each day of creation represents an epoch or millennium, however, this type of interpretation is not short of problems. In order for this to be the case the literary genre of Genesis must be poetic in nature, and the evidence is lacking. Genesis does not read like Hebrew poetry at all. Secondly, there is no explicit textual evidence. We are never told anything that indicates such an interpretation is correct. Beyond that, we must remember the original audience. The ancient Hebrews were simple, pre-enlightenment people. One of the rules of Bible study is, “the simplest interpretation is often the right one.” The simplest interpretation of the days of creation is that they are just that; literal days. Questions arise regarding the dating of the age of the earth, and while these are good questions, they are questions that this study doesn’t seek to address. We are dealing with what the text says. Below is an order of the days and what each day included.

### ***DAY ONE: FORMLESS AND EMPTY EARTH AND HEAVENS, AND LIGHT (1:1-5)***

After creating a formless and empty earth and heavens, God says, “Let there be light.” We are not told how God created the heavens and the earth, but we do find out that God’s primary means of creating from that point on is merely by speaking, demonstrating the unimaginable power and majesty God possesses. It’s also important to note that the light separates the darkness, but that God does not create darkness. Darkness is simply the absence of light. Even more interesting, is that God has not yet created the sun, moon, and the stars. It simply says He has created light. The source of the light is not clear in the text, however one can’t help but remember that Jesus is the source of light in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21:23; 22:5).

### ***DAY TWO: THE EXPANSE (1:6-8)***

The next thing God creates is something first called, “the expanse.” We eventually find out that this is heaven. Once again, we have to use caution in how we understand the word, “heaven.” Heaven here simply means

the sky, or anything that is above the ground. Later in the Psalms, the Psalmist writes, “the heavens declare the glory of God,” and then makes the connection that it is the sky he is speaking of (Ps. 19:1). The sky is formed on day two, which is fairly straightforward. What is more difficult to understand is what the sky separates. In verse 7 it says that the sky, “separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so.” Imagine, the waters below (presumably the ocean although without boundaries yet), and then the sky, and then above the sky is another body of water. Many scholars suggest that this is the, “great deep” that opens up in Genesis 7:11-12 during the flood. Others suggest that this is merely phenomenological language that is simply meant to be understood as water that forms into clouds. Either way, the sky is created on day two.

***DAY THREE: EARTH AND SEA DIVISIONS, VEGETATION, SEEDED PLANTS, TREES BEARING FRUIT (1:9-13)***

On day three, more shape is given to this now not-so-formless earth. God sets the boundaries of the waters to a specific place, and the dry land emerges. He calls the land earth, and the waters the sea. This is an act that God refers back to when speaking to Job (Job 38:8-11). He also calls forth vegetations, and plants that produce seeds, and trees that produce fruit. This would become the food for the first man and woman. In fact, meat does not become an option for food until after the flood (Gen. 9:2-3).

***DAY FOUR: THE SUN, MOON, AND STARS (1:14-19)***

Finally, the sources of light are created on day four. God creates the stars in the sky, and then sets apart two special lights marked as, “the greater light,” and, “the lesser light.” The greater light governs the day and the lesser light governs the night, indicating that these two lights are no doubt the sun and the moon. Moses includes verse 14, where he says of the sun and moon, “let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years.” The purpose of the sun and the moon specifically is to mark time. Days and years become a reality with a timed, predictable rise and fall of the greater light.

***DAY FIVE: SEA LIFE AND AIR LIFE (1:20-23)***

Day five presents the first creation of creature life. Up to this point, God has created plant life, but there are no creatures yet. Day five is committed entirely to the fish of the sea and the birds of the air. There is also an interesting detail in verse 21. There is a distinction made between the normal creatures of the sea and, “the great sea monsters.” The Psalmist names this sea monster Leviathan. In Psalm 73:13-14, the Psalmist writes, “You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea monsters in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.” Leviathan is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture too, but perhaps with no more description than Job 41:1-34. He sounds very dragon-like in the description in Job, and Isaiah confirms this suspicion. Isaiah 27:1 records, “In that day the LORD will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, with His fierce and great and mighty sword, even Leviathan the twisted serpent; And He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea.” The sea is a scary place in the modern world, and how much more terrifying in the ancient world. It all began on day five.

***DAY SIX: LAND LIFE, MAN, AND WOMAN (1:24-31)***

The final day of work in creation brings all of life that dwells on the land, including God’s crown jewel of creation, man and woman. God creates man and woman in a unique manner, in that man and woman are made, “in His Image.” Much has been said regarding the Image of God. What does it mean? Some have posited that it is humanity’s mental capacity to reason, an ability that doesn’t seem too advanced in even the smartest and most intelligent animals. Humans also are the only creatures who possess the complexity of language. Other creatures can communicate, but language is a faculty reserved only for mankind. Once again, this is an example where great caution should be taken regarding our treatment of, “the Image of God.” Ancient man would not have had a grasp on the metaphysical ideas that we often think of first. Once again, the simplest interpretation is often the right one. What is the simplest explanation of the, “Image of God?” It’s

that man and woman look like Him. That might sound very shocking, but it's not so far-fetched in the context of Genesis. Often times, God comes on to the scene and seems to look like a man. In Genesis 3:8, we find God, "walking in the garden in the cool of the day." This could be an anthropomorphism, a literary device commonly used in the Old Testament. However, in Genesis 18, God and His angels are literally described as, "men," and yet Abraham recognizes them and treats them accordingly. Jacob wrestles with what is described as a man, which turns out to be God, all night in Genesis 32:24-30.

What about textual evidence? How does Genesis use this word, "Image?" In Genesis 5:3, Adam fathers a son, "after His own likeness, in His image." Here, once again, the idea is conveyed of like appearance. There are a couple of times when it is used slightly differently in the Old Testament, but with even more problematic meaning. The addition of the phrase, "according to our own likeness," should not be missed, as it is also found in Genesis 5:3. It conveys the idea of not just similar appearance but activity. It's not that men are created merely in God's Image, but also that we act and have privileges that are similar to God's, and some of those privileges are given in the following verse. Humans are to rule over creation as God's stewards. We are given authority, and with authority comes responsibility. Don't be mistaken; God is not in the Image of humans. On the contrary, humans are created in the Image of God.

Keep in mind, that Genesis includes very early accounts of how God reveals Himself. We know the fullness of God's revelation in His Son Jesus Christ, and we have a well-developed theology regarding God that the ancient Hebrews did not. Is this how modern day Christians should understand God? I would answer, "partially." But not fully. God is Spirit (Jn. 4:24). God is invisible (Col. 1:15). God is Triune (Matt. 28:19). It's important for Christians to understand the developing nature of God in Genesis, but also understand that the story doesn't end there.

#### **DAY SEVEN: REST (2:1-3)**

The final day of the creation week ends with God resting from His creative work. God blesses the seventh day because on it He rests, which sets up the foundation for the Sabbath day for rest for God's people. Man should rest every seven days, because even God rested. While it isn't the strongest evidence alone, it is nonetheless more evidence of a literal seven day creation week.

## **Corresponding Parts**

One final note should be mentioned regarding the order of creation. Hebrew sometimes employs a literary device known as *chiasm*. Chiasm is a way of organizing corresponding parts in an intentional order, and the order of creation is one of the many Old Testament examples of this.

A1: Light (Day 1)	>	A2: Sun, moon, stars (Day 4)
B1: The skies and the waters (Day 2)	>	B2: The birds of the sky and the fish of the sea (Day 5)
C1: The dry land (Day 3)	>	C2: The beasts of the field and humanity (Day 6)

There are corresponding parts. Day one, light is created; day four, the instruments of light are created. Day two, the sky and sea are created; day five, the creatures that populate the sky and sea are created. Day three, the dry land emerges; day six, the creatures of dry land are created. What are we to make of this? If nothing else, not only is there is there great purpose and detail given to God's creation, but there is order to it. It is well-organized. It was not random. Everything God does can be described in this way. God is not a God of disorder (1 Cor. 14:33). Creation is a magnificent example of His power, preeminence, and purposeful ordering of events, culminating in the origin of all things.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Genesis 1:1-5. What is created on the first day? What was the source of light since the sun and moon had not yet been created? Read Revelation 21:23 and 22:5. What is a *possible source* of light?

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2. Read Genesis 1:6-8. What is created on the second day? What is the more common word for, “expanse?” What does the expanse separate?

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### Day Two

1. Read Genesis 1:9-13. What is created on the third day?

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2. Read Genesis 1:14-19. What is created on the fourth day? What is the greater light? What is the lesser light? What is the purpose of these lights?

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### Day Three

1. Read Genesis 1:20:23. What is created on the fifth day? What does the great sea monster refer to? Read Job 41:1-34, Psalm 74:13-14, and Isaiah 27:1. What is your impression of Leviathan?

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2. Read Genesis 1:24-31. What is created on the sixth day? What is special about man and woman? What does it mean that man and woman are created in God’s Image? (Hint: See above)

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### Day Four

1. Read Genesis 2:1-3. What does God do on the seventh day? Why is this significant to believers of Moses’ day? Why is this significant to believers in our day?

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2. What does the order of creation say about the way in which God creates?

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## Week 1 Discussion: Origin of Species

Genesis 1 answers one of life’s most pressing questions: “Where did we come from?” Charles Darwin sought to answer that question in his book, *Origin of Species*, the most important work for Darwinian evolution to date. However, Genesis provides all the information needed to answer this question confidently. Discuss as a group the importance of Genesis 1, and the importance of answering the origin question.

1. Icebreaker: Was there ever a moment in your life when you truly wondered where you came from prior to becoming a Christian? How did you seek to answer that question?
2. Why do you believe God included the details that are found in Genesis 1? Is this question of our origin a new question, or one that has been around for quite some time? Give explanation for your answer.
3. What does God's careful order of creation suggest about God's character?
4. In your own opinion, what does it mean to be made in the Image of God? Is your opinion the same or different than the reasoning given in this week's study?
5. How important is rest for Christians? Why? When is your rest day (Sabbath)? Do you take one weekly, or do you need to work on prioritizing it more in your life? Talk as a group about the importance of rest.

## Takeaways:

1. God created everything in a literal, seven-day week with great care, precision, and order.
2. Man and woman are created in God's Image and after His own likeness.

### *PRAYER REQUESTS:*