

The Beginning

January 7, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Genesis 1:1-15

Session Outline

1. God Created (Genesis 1:1-2)
2. Created with Purpose (Genesis 1:3-8)
3. Created with Order (Genesis 1:9-15)

Theological Theme

Everything begins and ends with God. His Word gives purpose and meaning to our lives.

Call to Action

God has created everything for a purpose and for His glory. Have you found your purpose in life? Commit to regularly reading God's Word so He will enlighten you to His will, His way, and His love for your life.



Leader Guide

The Beginning

Introduction

Take a minute to name some things that you or your kids have created recently. When we talk about creating things, we often think about art, play dough, building or remodeling a home, plastic construction blocks, or something similar. It is fun to create a building from cinder blocks and wood beams or to see a child make a replica of something recognizable, but there is a vast difference between the kind of creating we do and the kind of creating God did in Genesis.

We have zero ability to speak things into being and we have zero power to form something from nothing. When we create it is about using items or resources that are already available. There is nothing wrong with our kind of creating, but we need to understand that we can never compete with the creative power of God. He stands alone as the ultimate Creator.

- ❓ What is something you or someone you know has created recently?
- ❓ What differences can you identify between human creation and God's work of creation?

Session Summary

Everything begins and ends with God, and His Word gives purpose and meaning to our lives. The creation account in Scripture starts the narrative of who God is and his matchless work of creating all things. We can know more about Him and His character by studying these first verses of the Bible.

The creation account emphasizes that God is all powerful, all knowing, and always present. He was there before time began, and He alone formed the world from nothing. God spoke the rest of creation into existence, and we can trust that just as He knows what is necessary to sustain all creation, He also knows what we need to live each day.

1. God Created (Genesis 1:1-2)

The first words of Scripture set the tone for the rest of the Bible and give us insight into God. The phrase “God created” sets the foundation for the origin of the world. God is the One who created what is about to be described with greater detail in following verses. The writer of Genesis leaves no confusion or question about how this planet came to be. The first verse of Genesis is direct and straightforward, declaring God as the creator.

- Why is it so important to recognize how the world was created and by whom? What changes if we don't start with this reality?

When you accept and believe what you read about God in Genesis, you will have less trouble believing the rest of the Bible. The God who is big enough and powerful enough to have created the heavens and the earth is big enough and powerful enough to do everything that we read in Scripture.

Those who study the details of how our planet functions in relationship to other planets, the sun and moon, often come back to the precision with which it all stays in place. For this galaxy to continue, every little detail matters. This points directly to intelligent design of God as Creator. This universe is right and perfectly ordered in a way that is only explained by God's intelligent design.

- How do you see the world being intelligently designed and why does it matter?

The word used for “created” in Genesis 1 is the ancient Hebrew word *bara*. It means to shape or create. God took nothing and formed the earth. Humankind has no ability to create in this same fashion. Artists, sculptors, or builders may fashion a creation, but they must use some type of preexisting material to do so. God formed and created the earth from nothing, which sets Him apart from mankind. Note the way the Bible describes the state of the earth before God began to organize His Creation. Verse two includes a reference to the Spirit of God, pointing to the idea of the Trinity as communicated throughout Scripture.

- Application: Why does it matter for daily life that God existed before creation and in the same way that He exists today? How does this encourage you about who He is?


Creation

The two accounts of creation (1:1–2:3 and 2:4–25) are designed respectively to demonstrate the all-wise and all-powerful sovereignty of God (first account) and His special creation of humanity to rule for Him over all other created things (second account). Though the creation stories are fundamentally theological and not scientific, nothing in them is contradicted by modern scientific understanding.


2. Created with Purpose (Genesis 1:3-8)

To bring organization to the chaos of darkness, God created light. The order of creation often reflects the pattern of how God works in your own life. When you need answers or help, God gives light through His Word and the church. Light brings clarity. Light shows the way and God started with light. God alone has the power to speak, and things happen. There was no delay. When God called for light, it was there.

God then divided that light and organized days. From the beginning, God gave us rhythms to guide our lives. There was a purpose to everything He did, including the sequence of creation. God is a God of order and brilliance. He started with the foundational aspects of creation before He created animals or people, which only reinforces that the sequence matters just as the design matters.


 How do you see the patterns of creation replicated in the way you see God working in your life?

Debates about the length of these first days of creation have always been and will continue. No matter where we land on this debate, this point further emphasizes the order and rhythm of creation. Consider how important days are. All of life as we know it revolves around days. Our lives are subjected to morning and night. We function according to the natural patterns that God set for us from day one.

 What does it say about God that He had a purpose for each aspect of creation?


Though the sun and moon had not yet been created, there was day and night. We know from other Scriptures that the new heavens won't have the sun or moon because God's presence will be the light (Revelation 22:5).

On that second day, God separated the waters of the land from the waters of the sky. Again, God spoke and things happened. He continued His work to provide for life in various forms through the creation and order of water. There were bodies of water gathered on the firmament and heavenly waters gathered in the sky, thus creating a system whereby the earth would continually receive the water needed for sustenance.

 Application: How does seeing the purpose and intentionality that God used in Creation speak to you today? Where do you need God's purpose in your life now?


3. Created with Order (Genesis 1:9-15)

The gathering of the waters also brought forth the land. Plants began to grow and flourish on the land. God created mature plants and trees that had the ability to continue to produce new vegetation that would further sustain God's creation.

 What order do you see in God's creation of vegetation on the earth?

The repetition of the phrase “according to their kinds” is an indication that God created things that could vary within its kind but something of one kind would not develop into something of another kind. God knows what is good, and He organized His creation to result further goodness. We further see God's order in that He did not create animals or humans until the earth was habitable and able to sustain life. He knows what is important for life and took care to make sure it was all available before He formed humankind. Though God's creation is familiar and routine to us today, He is no less active in sustaining all things moment by moment. Colossians 1:15-17 reminds us:

*He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn over all creation.
For everything was created by him,
in heaven and on earth,
the visible and the invisible,
whether thrones or dominions
or rulers or authorities—
all things have been created through him and for him.
He is before all things,
and by him all things hold together.*

 How is it encouraging that God knows what you need for sustained life and is actively supplying that in each moment?

The creation sets the stage for the rest of Scripture and reveals many characteristics about God. His nature is unchanging. What we see about God at creation is still true of God today. He sees our every need and knows how to provide for every situation we will face.

Day three revealed that God's organized approach to creation was the pattern He continued to use. He is a God of order and purpose. We see this in the details of creation as well as in our own lives. After separating the heavens and earth, God created plants equipped for continual reseeding and new vegetation growth. His plans encompassed future needs for life and growth.

God then made the sun, moon, and stars. These were organized and set with a purpose to mark and measure time, directions, and seasons. Way before GPS, people were able to use these celestial bodies for guidance and direction.

Genesis chapter one makes it clear: the Bible is a story about God. The Christian faith begins and ends with God. Here in the very first verse, God is pulling back the curtain; He's revealing something about Himself, His glory, His majesty, His power, and authority. Our goal and purpose as Christians is to know and love our Creator God.



Application: What stands out to you most about the character and nature of God from today's study?

Conclusion

The account of creation in Scripture gives clear insight into God and has implications for our lives today. From the first words of Genesis, we see that God is eternal—He existed before anything else—and He is a triune God.

The fact that God created the world from nothing sets Him apart and reminds us of His power. After He created the world, He began speaking other parts of creation into existence. God spoke and things happened. There is great intentionality and purpose about every aspect of creation. To study Creation is to see the proof of intelligent design because every detail was accounted for and matters.

God brought order to chaos then as He does now. There was intention to the sequence of creation. Just as we trust that God knew what He was doing when He spoke various aspects of creation into being, we also can trust that He knows what He is doing with the sequence and timing of our lives. We can see His hand at work even when we don't see all the details, we can trust that He holds everything together. Creation reminds us of God's power, control, and goodness.

- ❓ What did you learn about creation from today's study?
- ❓ Why does it matter if we believe God created everything or if we believe it came about some other way? How does this impact daily life?
- ❓ How might you seek out gospel conversations with others by sharing what the Bible teaches about creation?

Prayer of Response

Praise the Lord for His attention to detail in Creation. Commit to trusting that He knows what you need and cares about all the details of your life.

Memory Verse

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. - Genesis 1:1

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Genesis* by Russell Moore and Phillip Bethancourt
- *Be Basic* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Genesis* by Andrew Steinmann

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Genesis

Purpose

Genesis lays the groundwork for everything else we read and experience in Scripture. Through Genesis we understand where we came from, how we got in the fallen state we are in, and the beginnings of God's gracious work on our behalf. Genesis unfolds God's original purpose for humanity.

Author

Since pre-Christian times authorship of the Torah, the five books that include the book of Genesis, has been attributed to Moses, an enormously influential Israelite leader from the second millennium BC with an aristocratic Egyptian background. Even though Genesis is technically anonymous, both the Old and New Testaments unanimously recognize Moses as the Torah's author (Jos 8:35; 23:6; 1Kg 2:3; 8:9; 2Kg 14:6; 23:25; 2Ch 23:18; 25:4; 30:16; 34:14; 35:12; Ezr 3:2; 6:18; Neh 8:1; 9:14; Dn 9:11, 13; Mal 4:4; Mk 12:19, 26; Lk 2:22; 20:28; 24:44; Jn 1:17, 45; 7:19; Ac 13:39; 15:21; 28:23; Rm 10:5; 1Co 9:9; Heb 10:28). At the same time, evidence in Genesis suggests that minor editorial changes dating to ancient times have been inserted into the text. Examples include the mention of "Dan" (14:14), a city that was not named until the days of the judges (Jdg 18:29), and the use of a phrase that assumed the existence of Israelite kings (Gn 36:31).

Setting

The Torah (a Hebrew term for "law" or "instruction") was seen as one unit until at least the second century BC. Sometime prior to the birth of Christ, the Torah was divided into five separate books, later referred to as the Pentateuch (literally, five vessels). Genesis, the first book of the Torah, provides both the universal history of humankind and the patriarchal history of the nation of Israel. The first section (chaps. 1–11) is a general history commonly called the "primeval history," showing how all humanity descended from one couple and became sinners. The second section (chaps. 12–50) is a more specific history commonly referred to as the "patriarchal history," focusing on the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants: Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons. Genesis unfolds God's plan to bless and redeem humanity through Abraham's descendants. The book concludes with the events that led to the Israelites being in the land of Egypt.

Special Features

The book of Genesis is the great book of beginnings in the Bible. True to the meanings of its Hebrew and Greek names (Hb *bereshith*, "In Beginning" [based on 1:1]; Gk *Geneseos*, "Of Birth" [based on 2:4]), Genesis permits us to view the beginning of a multitude of realities that shape our daily existence: the creation of the universe and the planet earth; the origins of plant and animal life; and the origins of human beings, marriage, families, nations, industry, artistic expression, religious ritual, prophecy, sin, law, crime, conflict, punishment, and death.

Extended Commentary

Genesis 1:1-15

1:1 This opening verse of the Bible, seven words in the Hebrew, establishes seven key truths upon which the rest of the Bible is based.

First, God exists. The essential first step in pleasing God is acknowledging his existence (Heb 11:6). Second, God existed before there was a universe and will exist after the universe perishes (Heb 1:10–12). Third, God is the main character in the Bible. He is the subject of the first verb in the Bible (in fact, he is the subject of more verbs than any other character) and performs a wider variety of activities than any other being in the Bible. Fourth, as Creator, God has done what no human could ever do; in its active form the Hebrew verb *bara'*, meaning “to create,” never has a human subject. Thus *bara'* signifies a work that is uniquely God’s. Fifth, God is mysterious; though this particular Hebrew word for God is plural, the verb form of which “God” is the subject is singular. This is perhaps a subtle allusion to God’s Trinitarian nature: He is three divine persons in one divine essence. Sixth, God is the Creator of heaven and earth. He does not just modify preexisting matter but calls matter into being out of nothing (Ps 33:6, 9; Heb 11:3). Seventh, God is not dependent on the universe, but the universe is totally dependent on God (Heb 1:3).

1:2 Bible translations since the time of the Septuagint, the translation of the OT into Greek (ca 175 BC), have rendered the first Hebrew verb in this verse as *was*. However, in an effort to explain the origins of evil and/or find biblical evidence for an old earth, some Bible scholars have suggested that this verb should be translated as “became.” Citing portions of Is 14:12–21 and Ezk 28:12–19, they believe a time gap, possibly a vast one, exists between the first two verses of the Bible, during which Satan led a rebellion in heaven against God. This allows interpreters to suggest that the early earth became formless and empty because Satan’s rebellion marred God’s good creation. However, the construction of this sentence in the original Hebrew favors the traditional translation (“was” rather than “became”).

The sense of v. 2 is that God created the earth “formless and empty” as an unfinished and unfilled state. Working through an orderly process over a period of six days, God formed (days 1–3) and filled (days 4–6) his created handiwork. The “forming” was accomplished by means of three acts of separating or sorting various elements of creation from one another. The “filling” was carried out through five acts of populating the newly created domains. Watery depths, a single word in Hebrew, suggests an original state of creation that was shapeless as liquid water. The Hebrew verb translated as *hovering*, used also in Dt 32:11, suggests that the Spirit of God was watching over his creation just as a bird watches over its young.

1:3 A foundational teaching of the Bible is that God speaks and does so with universe-changing authority. The command in this verse is just two words in Hebrew.

1:4 Another basic truth of the Bible is that God saw; this means he is fully aware of his creation. Later writers directly declared that God is aware of events occurring throughout the earth (2Ch 16:9; Zch 4:10). The term *good*, used here for the first of seven times in this chapter to evaluate God’s creative work, can be used to express both high quality and moral excellence. The physical universe is a good place because God made it. God found satisfaction in his labor. This is the first instance where God separated the twin realms of light and darkness, day and night. God’s activity in the material world parallels the role he also performs in the moral universe, that of the righteous Judge distinguishing between those who live in moral light and those who do not (1Th 5:5).

1:5 In ancient Israel, the act of naming an object, place, or person indicated that you held control over it (35:10; 41:45; Nm 32:42; Dt 3:14; Jos 19:47; 2Kg 23:34; 24:17). When God named the light and the darkness, he asserted his lordship and control over all of time. There was an evening. In ancient Israelite and modern Jewish tradition, sundown is the transition point from one day to the next. Scholars differ over the meaning of “day” in the phrases “one day . . . the second day,” etc. Some argue for twenty-four-hour periods, but other options are possible, especially since (1) there was at first no sun by which to distinguish twenty-four-hour periods, (2) “day” means the period of daylight in 1:5a, and (3) “day” refers to the whole creation period in 2:4 (“at the time” is lit “on the day”). Consequently, some scholars understand the “days” of creation as extended periods of uncertain length or as a rhetorical device by which the account of creation is structured.

1:6 Based on a verb that can refer to covering something with a thin sheet of metal (Nm 16:39; Is 40:19), the noun expanse always refers to the vast spread of the open sky.

1:7 God’s second act of separation was to divide atmospheric water from terrestrial water. Thus he began the process of giving form to the material world. The clause it was so, found six times in this chapter, emphasizes God’s absolute power over creation.

1:8 Sky can refer to the earth’s atmospheric envelope (v. 20), outer space (v. 15), or “heaven,” the spiritual realm where God lives (Ps 11:4).

1:9 God’s third and final act of separation created oceans and continents.

1:10 In his third and final act of naming, God demonstrated his authority over all of the earth. This contrasts with what Israel’s polytheistic neighbors believed about the range of divine powers. Their gods were not all-powerful, but instead exercised authority over a limited territory. The God of Gn 1 holds dominion over everything at all times and in all places.

1:11–13 In preparation for the introduction of animal and human life, God provided an abundant supply of food. The consistent biblical teaching is that “like begets like” (Lk 6:44; Jms 3:12); Gn 1:11–12 establishes that principle for plant life. While five of the six days contain at least one act of creation evaluated as good, only the third and sixth days have this statement more than once.

1:14–15 The events of day four complement those of day one, filling the day and night with finished forms of light. The various lights, or “light-giving objects,” were worshiped as gods in the cultures that surrounded ancient Israel. In Genesis, however, the sun, moon, and stars are portrayed as servants of God that would fulfill three roles: separating the newly created realms of day and night; marking time so that those who worshiped the Creator could keep their festivals in each of the seasons (cp. Lv 23:4, 44); and providing light on the earth.

References

1. Robert D. Bergen, “Genesis,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 5–6.