

God Creates All Things for His Glory

Genesis 1:1-25

Focus Verse

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” – Genesis 1:1

- God Created – Genesis 1:1-2
- God Formed – Genesis 1:3-13
- God Filled – Genesis 1:14-25

Engage

“**Why is there something rather than nothing?**” Science and philosophy have pondered this foundational question for centuries. Three possible answers exist. Atheism says there is no God; therefore, something has always existed. Pantheism says everything is God, and God is everything. Theism believes there is one, personal Creator God who made everything that exists out of nothing.

What we believe about God, ourselves and the world ultimately drives actions, attitudes and behaviors. Biblical Christianity affirms, “by faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”¹ **The one, true God of the Bible stands at the base of all reality and, in fact, defines reality.** Because He exists eternally, your life is not meaningless. Because He is Creator and Sustainer of all, you are not entitled to establish your own standards or fashion your own reality. Your purpose is set. You are accountable to Him – your loving, almighty, all-powerful God, Father and Creator.

God Created – Genesis 1:1-2

Genesis 1 and 2 give the account of creation.

Both chapters feature the same event, but with a different approach. Genesis 1 presents the glory and majesty of God as Creator of the whole world. God, who is transcendent – infinitely higher in all His ways – forms and fills the earth by the power of His Word. Genesis 2 presents the intimacy of creation as God draws near to personally fashion man and woman in His image. This week we focus on Genesis 1. Next week we look at the details of Genesis 2.

All Creation – 1:1

The Bible opens with the awe-inspiring statement, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Deep truths reside in this opening verse alone. As we embark on the Bible’s account of creation, it is important we know how best to approach this passage. Our first instinct might be to approach creation with questions of “how,” “why,” “where” or “when.” The Bible does not primarily speak into these intriguing questions. Rather, the Bible speaks to questions of “who” and “so what.” Who is responsible for the world? And why does it matter? Genesis 1:1 tells us

He alone is responsible for the world, for you and for me. Why does this matter? **Because if God made everything, including you and me, that means we are accountable to Him.**

In Genesis 1:1, the Hebrew word for “create” is *bara*. This verb is used a total of three times throughout the Genesis 1 creation account (Genesis 1:1, 1:21, 1:27). *Bara* can refer to “creating something from nothing,” or it can refer to “reforming existing materials.” Either way, it always signifies God’s divine creation of something strikingly new. Genesis 1:1 speaks of God’s creation of the original substance of the universe, something strikingly new. Genesis 1:21 speaks of God’s creation of sentient or conscious life, animal life as opposed to plant life, something strikingly new. And Genesis 1:27 speaks of God’s creation of man and woman in His image, something strikingly new and indelibly glorious.

The Latin phrase *ex nihilo*, meaning “out of nothing,” is often attributed to God’s act of creation. **Beyond the Genesis account, the whole counsel of Scripture confirms the concept of God creating out of nothing.** John 1:3 affirms, “Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has

been made.” Psalm 33:9 declares, “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” Both of these verses further expand our view and understanding of God and His creation.

The Earth – 1:2

With Genesis 1:2, our focus narrows from the entire universe to planet Earth. The Spirit of God hovered over a formless, empty, dark abyss of water. This verse is often met with confusion. How much time passed with the earth in this state? We do not know. Many people view Genesis 1:1 as a summary statement of God’s creation which implies God’s act of creation

begins with Genesis 1:2. Other theories propose long periods of time and events occurred between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.

Because no human being was present when God created the world, we should approach theories and questions about creation with humility and grace. **Faithful believers who accept the authority of the Bible disagree about the details and timeline of creation.** Conversations with others, both believers and unbelievers, help us better understand new facets of God’s power and creativity. As we form opinions and respond to others, humility helps us focus on the most important aspect of creation, our personal and powerful Creator God.

The Doctrine of God the Father

“In the beginning God ...” A simple, yet profound phrase. The Hebrew word translated to “God” in this verse is *Elohim*, which means “supreme one” or “mighty one.” The word itself is plural yet used as if singular. This emphasizes that God is one being who exists in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.² All three are equally God and involved in creation. Creation is said to be from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. Genesis 1:2 mentions the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 1:2 clearly states the universe was made through Jesus, the Son. **God the Father is Creator, Sustainer and Judge of all.** From this one, simple, initial phrase in Genesis 1:1, we learn much about our God and Father.

- **God is self-existent.** Before anyone or anything else, there was God. God exists in and of Himself by His own power. He has no origin. This is true of nothing else in the universe. Everything else – people, plants, cars, stars – has a cause for existence. **God is the uncaused, uncreated One and the ultimate cause of all creation.** God’s self-existence means God is answerable to no one. He sometimes explains His actions to us through His Word ... but He does not always, and He does not have to. He is God.
- **God is self-sufficient.** God has no needs and depends on no one. As human beings, we depend on many things – oxygen, heat, light, gravity, the laws of nature. If any of these go away, we die. But not God. Anything and everything can go away, but God will still exist. **Because God is the only self-sufficient One, He is the only One worthy of our trust.** God does not need a relationship with us. He does not need us to worship Him. He does not need us to accomplish His plans and purposes. But what joy to realize God nevertheless stoops to work in and through us and have relationship with us. We may rest knowing His sufficiency.
- **God is eternal.** God was, is and will always be. He is “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.”³ God’s eternity means God is unchanging. He does not change His mind.⁴ He is not fickle. His will and promises stand firm from generation to generation. Therefore, we need not fear that God’s love for us might change or fade. He remains holy, wise, just and gracious. We are eternally secure in the arms of our eternal God and Father because His Son made that possible.

There is much about God we cannot fully understand, but **God has revealed enough about Himself to lead us to breathless awe and humble worship.** Truth about God evokes a variety of responses in us. His unlimited power and authority rightly lead us to respectful and holy “fear” before His greatness.⁵ The unshakeable foundation of God’s unwavering character also steadies us in daily life. Without God Himself as our anchor, we are tossed around by a constantly changing stream of human ideas. Without God, we limit our pleasure and purpose to the tastes, smells, sounds and experiences of a quickly fleeting earthly life. Psalm 18:31 asks a question we do well to answer: “For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God?” How much do you think about God, the perfect Father? Build your life on the Rock, God Himself.

God's work of creation continues through the remainder of Genesis 1. Verse three onward unfolds an orderly account that reveals the mind and purposes of God. **God worked to form what was formless and to fill what was empty.** In days one through three, God formed the heavens and earth. In days four through six, God filled what He had formed with animated life, beauty, texture and color. These verses capture the structure, rhythm and motion of creation. By God's spoken word, the uninhabitable became habitable. He separated darkness from light. He created life from nonlife. God spoke, creation appeared and He declared it was good.

The First Day: Light – 1:3-5

At the sound of the booming voice of God, light separated from darkness. He called the light “day” and the darkness “night.” God's initial act of creation represents an amazing breakthrough. God brought light to His creation. Light brings revelation, the ability to know and be known. Light takes over the darkness.

How did light fill the earth prior to the creation of the sun, moon and stars on day four? We cannot know for certain, but Scripture often depicts God Himself as light. The apostle John captures the holiness and moral perfection of God when he proclaims, “God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.”⁶ **We worship the God who created light and who Himself is light.**

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The Second Day: Sky – 1:6-8

The second day of creation included another act of separation, as God increasingly brought order out of the formless. God separated the water below from the water above to form earth's atmosphere, a “vault” or canopy above the earth. He stretched out sky, the domain of space so vast that its reaches remain unknown. God prepared atmospheric layers to surround and protect our planet. The sky stands high above our heads, reminding us of how small we are before our great God. Psalm 108:4 declares, “For great is your love, higher than the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies.” **We worship the God who stands above us and apart from us but calls us to know Him.**

The Third Day: Land – 1:9-13

On the third day, God set boundaries as He contained the waters under the sky to form seas, rivers, lakes and oceans. Dry land appeared, creating an environment ready for a variety of vegetation. Signs of life emerged on the earth from this point forward. From the soil sprung seed-bearing plants capable of reproduction and of yielding colorful flowers, ripe fruits and crispy vegetables.

The variety of landscapes and plant life in our world reflects the width and breadth of God's creativity and care. Creation reveals the depth and diversity within God Himself. Mountain vistas, roaring oceans, plains, deserts, marshes and frozen tundra all present unique expressions of beauty. God prepared vegetation adaptable to each environment. Lush vegetation fills jungles. Rocky crags host trees whose bent branches boast survival of harsh elements. Cacti and wildflowers thrive in arid climates. The multiplied hues of flowers and falling leaves display a vibrant color spectrum only God could imagine. **We worship the God whose beauty and majesty are inexhaustible.**

The Fourth Day: Sun, Moon and Stars – 1:14-19

The fourth day signifies a transition. **God now filled the heavens and earth He had formed with teeming life, moving creatures and the cadence of time.** On day four, God fastened lights in the sky to serve as signs marking the seasons, days and years. He established the rhythms of day and night, summer and winter, spring and fall. Never once has our faithful Creator forgotten or failed to cause the sun to rise or the seasons to change. The well-known hymn “Great is Thy Faithfulness” magnifies the faithfulness of God seen through creation: “Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest, Sun, moon and stars in their courses above, Join with all nature in manifold witness To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.” Creation proclaims God’s faithfulness.

Endless galaxies, rotating planets and twinkling stars proclaim the vastness of God’s character and power. Every human who has ever lived benefits from God’s faithfulness, as witnessed in the sky above us. Human language cannot fully express all that God is. **We worship a God whose plans and provisions order our lives with loving precision.**

The Fifth Day: Life in Sea and Sky – 1:20-23

God filled the waters and sky with signs of life on day five. In contrast to plant life, sentient life has the ability to feel and perceive. One Bible translation reads, “And God said, ‘Let the waters swarm with swarms of living souls...’” (Darby’s Translation). For the first time since Genesis 1:1, Scripture employs the term “created” (in Hebrew, *bara*). We are not told how, but God formed creatures suited to every environment from ocean depths to high above the earth. The brilliant colors of tropical fish dazzle us. Birds sing songs unique to their species, overcome gravity to take flight and migrate in clearly prescribed paths. When we ponder the creatures that soar above us and swim beneath us, God’s work amazes us. To examine the variety of species God created from fossil records and in our own time is to stand in awe of Him.

On each day, God saw His work and pronounced it “good.” God also blessed His creation for the first time on the fifth day. The word “blessed” means to make happy, to give divine favor. God blessed birds and water creatures with fruitfulness – the power to reproduce according to their kinds. They received life from God. Now, they were able to pass life on. **We worship the God who is the giver of life.**

The Sixth Day: Land Animals – 1:24-25

On the sixth day, God first filled the land from the land. God said, “Let the land produce living creatures ...” (1:24). God commanded the land and thereby formed land animals. The animals are grouped in three classes – livestock, wild animals and crawling creatures. Next week, we study the pinnacle of God’s creation as God intimately formed Adam from the earth and Eve from Adam’s earthly body.

All God’s creation finds full identity in displaying His glory. The vastness of the sky, filled with more heavenly bodies than can be mapped or named, declares God’s glory. Every location on the globe experiences the regular rising and setting of the sun and the predictable changing of seasons that give order to life. We see and enjoy the plants God designed. In countless varieties, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea and the animals on the land give testimony to God’s provision and creativity. Animal instincts and behaviors defy human explanation and reveal divine wisdom. Without human words, God’s creation loudly declares the glory of its Creator. The intricacy and multiplied diversity in the created world could not happen by chance.

Why do people ignore or passionately deny the Creator behind creation? How could the order, beauty and interdependency witnessed in the created world exist if not designed by One with infinite knowledge and power? **To acknowledge the reality of a Creator invites personal accountability to the One who designed the world.** Some choose to ignore or deny this amazing revelation to rationalize their independence from God, even while living and enjoying what God created. God must awaken dead hearts for them to understand and yield to the divine love revealed by this world’s grandeur.

Acknowledging our Creator God is vital to understand the world’s purpose and our own. At a time in history almost like no other, people are eager to preserve the earth’s beauty and resources from further damage. God agrees. God remains responsible to care for, restore and ultimately reveal perfection through His work in our natural world. We honor God when we preserve and steward well His beautiful earth.

The Creator of the universe became a man who walked on this earth. He died to redeem all people who believe in Him by grace through faith. These realities about God cannot be ignored. Ultimately, either as Savior or as Judge, “every tongue [will] acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” **Let us worship the God of creation!**

“And God saw that it was good.”

Seven times throughout the creation account, God declares His creation “good.” Creation is not good only because it is practically useful to us. **Creation is good because God made it and declared it good in and of itself.** The goodness of creation reveals God’s nature. He alone is fully good and, therefore, can create only what is good. Even after the Fall and subsequent pervasion of sin, God upholds the value of creation. In Genesis 9, after the Flood, God established a covenant with Noah, Noah’s descendants, every living creature and even the earth itself.⁸ Similarly, in Romans 8, God expresses the value of creation when He includes all of creation in His promise of future deliverance.⁹ If God finds creation good, we must find creation good as well. This means:

- We should be **thankful** for God’s creation and praise Him for it.
- We should **delight** in creation.
- We should demonstrate a **responsibility** toward creation.

To contemplate and uphold the value of creation brings honor and glory to the God of creation. This should cause us to trust Him more. If God cares so deeply for the plants and animals, how much more does He care for you and me?¹⁰ As we praise the God of creation, we join throngs of heaven’s angels who shout: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”¹¹

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Genesis 1:1 lays the foundation for the remainder of the Bible: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” God’s eternal existence and His power to speak the world into being rise as life-shaping truths from the opening pages of the Bible. God’s purposeful design indicates wisdom and intelligence far beyond the limits of human minds. Why did the self-existent God create? Why is His creation so intricately beautiful? **God created all things purposefully to display His glory.** Creation offers indisputable evidence of God, the Creator. The Bible explains even more. We are responsible to know and worship the one triune God. We are accountable to our Creator to respond to the grace He gives as we live for our appointed time in this world.

God’s intentional focus on planet earth deserves attention. **The infinite God targets earth and its people as the place He can be known.** A mere speck in the unmeasured vastness of creation, our planet takes center stage. Astronomers estimate our Milky Way galaxy contains 100 billion to 400 billion stars. An estimated 500 billion more galaxies lie outside our galaxy. Yet the Lord says His children are more precious to Him than all these worlds. God Almighty ordained this earth as home for humanity and the central place of importance in His story. Genesis 1 presents all of creation in direct relationship to planet Earth. God created earth as the scene the Son of God would enter. And one day, God will restore the earth when the Son of God returns.

Apply It

We get uncomfortable with things we cannot understand. Creation, and all it reveals about God, quickly takes us beyond our human capacity. **God is incomprehensible.** The inner workings of creation, whether viewed through a microscope or telescope, reveal much we

cannot comprehend or control. Artificial intelligence and human genome research cannot unlock all the mysteries in God’s grand design. While you cannot understand everything about God, how have you responded to what you can understand? What do you understand about your

Creator God from Genesis 1? The powerful God who is beyond you in every way loves you in ways you cannot fully grasp. In Ephesians 3:19, Paul prays that the Ephesian Christians would “know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the

fullness of God.” God determines what we should know, even when the full truth surpasses us. Do you try to fit God into a box you can rationalize or explain? Can you trust God with what you cannot understand about Him? Are you acting responsibly with what God has revealed about Himself?

God separated light from darkness. **Light reveals what the darkness hides.** As we study God’s Word, His truth illuminates our lives, revealing who He is and who we really are. We need not fear God’s light exposing what the

darkness hides in our lives. His heart for us is to redeem and deliver us, to set us free. 2 Corinthians 4:6 says, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.” As you study Genesis this year, will you trust God’s holy light to lead you to know Him, His Son and His glory?

In Genesis 1, God spoke, and amazing things happened. **The same powerful God who separated the waters with His**

words still speaks. God speaks through His Word, His Son, His Spirit and His people. This week, as you read of the powerful God and His work in creation, how did God speak to you? How did His power and beauty raise your eyes from a hard situation in life to think about His might and majesty? Did your eyes catch on something beautiful God created and wanted you to notice? Did someone in your group share an insight that elevated your thoughts about God? The God of eternity still speaks.¹² How well are you listening?

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God’s Word in this week’s lesson.

1: God’s creation: Hebrews 11:3

2: Trinity: John 1:1-5

3: Alpha and Omega: Revelation 21:6

4: Unchanging: Numbers 23:19

5: Fear of the Lord: Deuteronomy 10:12; Job 28:28; Psalm 33:8; Proverbs 9:10

6: God is light: 1 John 1:5

7: Acknowledge: Philippians 2:11

8: Noahic Covenant: Genesis 9:9-10, 13

9: Promised deliverance: Romans 8:21

10: God’s care: Matthew 6:26, 30

11: Worthy of praise: Revelation 4:11

12: God speaks: Hebrews 1:1-2