

**YOU CAN
UNDERSTAND™
THE BOOK OF
GENESIS**

SKIP HEITZIG



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In the Beginning

GENESIS 1

The title *Genesis* comes from a Greek word meaning “origin,” but the Hebrew name for the book, *Bereshit*, comes from its opening words: “In the beginning.” God turned on the lights of the universe and got to work making the natural world—celestial bodies, oceans and land masses, animals and plants, and the pinnacle of His creation, the first man. People were (and are) His focus, bearers of His image and ambassadors of His glory. And when God looked at all He had made, He called it “very good.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, Meet God

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

You can’t go back any further than “in the beginning.” The question is, when was “in the beginning”? Many evangelicals hold to a young earth theory, insisting it is no more than 10,000 years old. Some of these folks get dogmatic and say it is just 6,000 years old; they contend that the genealogies in Genesis are exhaustive, and by counting up the years of people’s ages recorded in the biblical text, they arrive at the 6,000-year figure. Along these lines, some even suggest that God

built aging factors into His initial creation so that it only *appeared* to be older. Others react, saying if that is the case, God would be a liar (making the universe look old when it's not).

Still others disagree with all of the above. They say the universe began anywhere from two to twenty billion years ago. Evolutionists have long believed that processes spanning billions of years have altered inanimate matter into a variety of lifeforms through slow changes and genetic mutations. And it's not just the evolutionists who insist on this. There are Christian leaders and scientists who advocate this approach to understanding the origins of the universe. Some even elongate the "six days" of creation into six epochal periods or geological eras of unspecified years.

Both groups can get animated about their respective positions as they argue over this issue. The problem, of course, is that none of us were there at the beginning, and so we can only guess the age of the universe. While that can be intellectually stimulating and even fun, years ago I decided to get out of the speculation business. So I don't know when the beginning took place, but I do know that *in the beginning, God*. That's how the Bible begins—not with philosophical arguments for the existence of God. Scripture simply works off the supposition that He exists. And because only He was there, only He can speak with real authority about the age of the earth or the universe and how it came about.

Some people can't even start there, though. Not only won't they say, "In the beginning, God," they would rather eliminate Him completely. In the beginning, they say, nothing existed except gasses floating in space. The typical naturalist works off the absurd idea that *no one plus nothing equals everything*. But eliminating God creates a big problem. Where did the space and the gas come from? Regressing an infinite number of years still doesn't answer the question. Gas and space came from somewhere. There must be some first uncaused cause, whether matter or God.

The typical explanation offered by scientists has been the Big Bang theory—the attempt to explain the beginning of the universe without

someone to begin it. But how does a big blast create the resultant synergy and order we observe in the cosmos? And what event or process set off the Big Bang? Though there have been various spin-offs of this theory, including the Steady State theory, none of them adequately explains where the energy came from or what holds everything together.

Scholars have made the essential observation that life has irreducible complexity, which demonstrates design. It's like a mousetrap—every part is necessary for it to function. Remove any single part, and the trap won't work. The hammer, the spring, the hold-down bar, and the platform are all irreducible components, and therefore necessary. In the same manner, the human eye couldn't have evolved. If you take away any of the parts—the lens, retina, vitreous humor, or optic nerve—you would be blind. If only 90 percent of an eye is developed, it won't work. So what happens all those billions of years while waiting for the eye to develop serendipitously from a light-sensitive cell? Well, you would be waiting in the dark! And while you were stumbling around, you would no doubt bump into a stronger, more developed creature that would make you its dinner. It would be the blind eating the blind. The complexity of life at its irreducible minimum is an overwhelming display of design, not evolutionary chance.

And so Scripture says, in the most understated and simple way, “In the beginning God.”

Why eliminate God from the beginning? Romans 1 tells us that even though creation clearly points to its creator, some people don't want to acknowledge God. Why not? Because as soon as you acquiesce to the idea that you live in a personal world made by a personal God, then you become morally accountable. It's simply more convenient and requires less responsibility for people to say, “In the beginning, space gasses caused a Big Bang.”

But Genesis 1:1 is the doorway to the Bible. It is the key that unlocks every other difficult portion of Scripture: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” If you can believe that, then the rest of the Bible will be easy for you. God literally made something out of

nothing. Miracles are simple for Him. Jonah and the whale? *Piece of cake*. Jesus walking on water? *A walk in the park*. A floating axe head, talking donkey, or a physical resurrection from the dead? *Yawn!*

The man or woman of faith is miles ahead of the man or woman of science alone. Hebrews 11 says that by faith we believe the word of God framed “the worlds”—both the universe and all the ages of the earth—and everything we see is made up of things we can’t see, like atoms and subatomic particles. Science is actually in the position of catching up with creation as each discovery reveals an aspect of what God made.

If you can combine science and faith—and I believe anyone can do so without sacrificing an ounce of integrity in either area—then you can put yourself far ahead of the game.

God didn’t tell us a lot about His creative process. He used only 630 words to describe the origin of *everything*. Think of it as an abridged version of creation. God spent far more time and space talking about Abraham, and, later, about the tabernacle. Why? Well, He didn’t inspire the writing of Genesis to give us a biology lesson (how many people in Moses’s day would have understood it if He had done that?). God aimed to show us briefly the origin of all things, and then to take us quickly to the origin of the Hebrew nation, through which would come the Savior of the world, the Messiah. That is the purpose of the book of Genesis: God is showing us the beginnings of redemptive history.

If you can sink your spiritual and intellectual teeth into this, you can move through life with confidence and stability. When the apostles were arrested in Jerusalem for spreading the truth of Christ’s atoning death and resurrection, do you remember how they prayed? “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them” (Acts 4:24). As they were about to make a hefty request, they first recognized the truth of Genesis 1:1. The basis of their prayer—the reason they thought God would answer it—is that God created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them: “Lord, if You did *that*, then You can certainly answer *this*. So here’s our issue, and we bring it to You based on our recognition of who You are.”

When you believe that God created the universe, you’ll find that faith comes more readily.

From Mud to Meaning

Genesis 1:2 describes God’s canvas, an earth “without form, and void.” Some suggest that it should be translated “the earth *became* without form and void,” indicating a gap of time between the initial creation of the planet and the devastation brought on by the rebellion of Satan and the judgment of God, which turned the earth to ruins—a pervasive barrenness. Those who espouse this *gap theory* point to Isaiah 45:18, which says, “For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it *in vain*.” I wouldn’t be too rigid about this, however. Those terms “without form” and “void” come from the Hebrew words *tohu* and *bohu*. *Tohu* means “ruined” or “empty,” and *bohu* means “vacant.” This signifies a wasteland, a place of utter desolation. The primeval world was unfinished and uninhabitable.

Is it possible that Satan fell between verses 1 and 2, and that the earth “became” without form and void after divine judgment, the result of war in heaven, so to speak, before a re-creation? Again, I’ll plead ignorance! I don’t know because I wasn’t there. Even if it’s possible, however, the main intent of the passage is to set the stage for God’s amazing act of creation.

It’s also worth mentioning that we are introduced to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, in the very second verse of the Bible; He “was hovering” over the unformed earth, preparing to superintend God’s construction project.

Turning on the Lights

God’s opening statement is famous, and in the original Hebrew, it’s also emphatic: God said, “Light be.” Short, sweet, and effective. God, the One who is uncreated light, brought created light into existence with a couple of simple words. He didn’t fret, “Now, what’s the recipe for light again?” No. He spoke, and it happened. God’s first recorded words in Scripture are, “Let there be light” (v. 3). And light was. In fact, the phrase “let there be” appears ten times in this chapter; you could call them the Ten Commandments of creation.

Now, we are not quite sure what initial form this light took. Could

it have been a luminous radiance exuding from a particular place? We're not told. The sun, moon, and stars were not created until the fourth day, but this initial light—whatever form it took—was enough to separate the night from the day and help transition the universe from chaos into a cosmos.

The Bible tells us God dwells in “unapproachable light” (1 Timothy 6:16). In the Old Testament, we read of the *shekinah* glory of God—a visible, light-filled presence of God that appeared first in the tabernacle and then later in the temple. Perhaps before God created the sun, moon, and stars, His *shekinah* glory lit up the universe.

Others suggest a different possibility. Perhaps God created the whole universe “in the beginning,” but for some reason—maybe because of a thick vapor canopy that encircled the earth before the flood—the sun, moon, and stars didn't become visible on the surface of the earth until day four. Again, it's fun to think about what might have happened, but the focus here is God at work, creating the essential features of the world.

The description of the first day concludes, “God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day” (Genesis 1:5).

What a great first day! The Bible uses the word *day* (Hebrew, *yom*) in three distinct ways. One refers to that portion of a twenty-four hour period during which light appears—the daytime, as opposed to the nighttime. The term can also mean an undefined period of time that might last from several days to many years. The biblical term “the Day of the Lord,” for example, refers to a constellation of events that occur over several years. Finally, the word often denotes a twenty-four hour period. Whenever you find a numerical adjective, such as “first” day or “second” day, it *always* refers to a twenty-four hour period. That's the usage in this text. The time boundaries are clearly delineated by stating that the events took place between “the evening and morning” (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

This is why I reject theistic evolution, which claims that each “day” in Genesis 1 refers to a period of millions or even billions of years. The

text here appears to go out of its way to teach that God created the whole cosmos in six twenty-four-hour periods. For God, even *that* is a long time. He could have created the whole universe in six seconds rather than six days! But He took His time and worked carefully.

Waterworld

During day two of creation, God separated all the water into two categories: above the firmament and below the firmament (vv. 6-8). What is a firmament? The Hebrew term *raqiya* can be translated “vault” or “dome” as well as “firmament.” It can mean “an expanse” or “an extended surface.” It probably refers to the sky or breathable atmosphere. Many believe that back then, a water (or vapor) canopy surrounded the earth like a dense fog. It created a sort of greenhouse effect, which made for a uniformly warm climate worldwide, with no barren deserts and no polar icecaps.

Many believe that this canopy of water kept mass air movements from forming—strong winds, hurricanes, etc. The canopy also filtered out harmful ultraviolet radiation that tends to shorten human lifespans. If true, this would help account for the longevity of people on the pre-flood earth. The presence of this unique atmospheric condition makes sense, for the Bible says that before the flood there was no rain (Genesis 2:5). And today, even without this canopy, the atmosphere can hold a lot of water. For example, a rainforest near Mount Waialeale on the island of Kauai boasts an average of 450 inches of rain per year (and has even seen as much as 660 inches)!²

God called the firmament “Heaven” (v. 8). The Bible uses the word *heaven* in three distinct ways, just like the word *day*. Sometimes the term refers to the immediate atmosphere, the part of the sky where birds fly and clouds float (as in Revelation 19:17). At other times, the word refers to outer space, where the sun and moon and stars hang out (Psalm 19:1). So we have the first heaven (the terrestrial heaven, or the atmosphere), the second heaven (the celestial one, or outer space), and finally, the third heaven, where God lives in all His unveiled glory (2 Corinthians 12:2-3).

Land Ho!

The third day began with the entire surface of the earth submerged underwater. But by the end of the day, not only did land emerge, so did foliage (vv. 9-10). Some cataclysmic upheaval must have shifted the surface of the earth so that the water plunged downward and gathered in what we call seas. The Bible uses the term *seas* to refer to all bodies of water, whether lakes, rivers, bays, or oceans.

Water is essential to life. It covers three-quarters of this planet and accounts for 65 percent of your flesh and 90 percent of your blood.³ We need water—in the air, on the land, and in our bodies. It's essential to digestion, reproduction, respiration, and everything we do.

Normally it would be impossible that, in a single day, what had been submerged in the morning could be dry enough to support sprouting vegetation by evening. But this wasn't a normal day! Again, I take you back to the first verse of the Bible. If God can create the universe *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), then His power has no limits. Jesus said, "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). The laws of nature never set limits on the creative power of God. He can both establish natural laws and, at the same time, override natural law by supernatural will.

Now, sometime in the future, this earth will experience a millennial kingdom—1,000 years of peace under Messiah's reign on a renewed earth (Revelation 20:1-3). Afterward, this earth will be destroyed, and a new earth will take its place: "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. *Also there was no more sea*" (Revelation 21:1). Apparently the new earth will no longer be a water-based planet, for our resurrected bodies will not depend on the same elements we find so necessary today. Our oceans take up 71 percent of the earth's surface, hold 97 percent of the earth's water, and are part of the hydrological cycle that waters the globe.⁴ Oceans also separate people groups from one another. On the new earth, the seas won't create such separations because there won't be any. We'll have instant access to everyone (no technology required).

Let It Grow

From the beginning, God established reproduction in the plant

world. The seeds in the earth's vegetation were programmed with DNA to ensure that each would reproduce "according to its kind" (v. 11), or species. The description here defies the evolutionary principle of transmutation—that over time, one type of thing turns into something totally different. The biblical account leaves plenty of room for variation within "kinds"—horizontal movement—but no room for one *kind* to turn into a different *kind*, or vertical movement. This discredits the notion that all life on earth descended from a common source. Paleontology (the study of the fossil record) lacks the kind of abundant evidence of transitional forms that ought to exist if transmutation actually occurred. Micro-movements certainly take place (Chihuahuas and St. Bernards), but not macro-movements (lizards into birds).

This also debunks theistic evolution—the idea that God made an early form of something and, over time, natural processes macro-evolved it into something else. The Bible makes it clear that when God made something, it was fully formed in its identity as a type of plant or animal, and able to reproduce itself as such. The offspring may have slightly different characteristics from their parent organisms, but those characteristics will still be *inherited* from their genetic makeup.

A Perfect Balance

God then set various lights in the heavens, the celestial bodies that provide both illumination and a sense of time and space: the sun, moon, and stars (vv. 14-18). From an earthbound perspective, the sun is at the center of our solar system and radiates light, while the moon reflects light. These were to be "signs" ("beacons" or "signals"). Sailors of old used these bodies for navigation, and people of all eras have used them to indicate seasons of the year. History's original calendars were lunar, based on the movement of the moon. Today we use a solar calendar, which is based upon the relationship of the earth to the sun.

Take a look at the stars tonight—admire their twinkling, estimate how many you can see, and how far away they might be. Then ask yourself this: If the art displayed in the night sky is so beautiful, what must the artist Himself be like?

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows

His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). God’s creation points us to our perfectly balanced and beautiful creator. Start with our galaxy: The Milky Way is a pinwheel-shaped cluster of luminaries that resembles a wide, thin watch. Astronomers have measured it at 10,000 light years by 100,000 light years, and the location of Earth is situated perfectly for the kind of life it hosts.⁵

People say, “It just happened that way.” But hold on. Did it just *happen* that the earth is ninety-three million miles from the sun, which has a surface temperature of 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit?⁶ If we were as close as Venus, we would burn up. If we were as far away as Mars, we would freeze. We are at just the right distance so that we don’t do either.

Did it just so *happen* that Earth’s axis is tilted at twenty-three-and-a-third degrees, giving us four beautiful seasons?⁷ Or that the makeup of the atmosphere is seventy-eight parts nitrogen to twenty-one parts oxygen, with one percent of variant gases that make breathing a pleasure?⁸ What if it was fifty-fifty nitrogen and oxygen instead? Well, the first person in history to start a fire would have been treated to the biggest (and last) fireworks display ever. Talk about the Big Bang theory!

Also, Earth makes 365.25 revolutions during its journey around the sun, fully rotating once every twenty-four hours. If our days were longer, we’d burn up, and if they were shorter, we’d freeze.

If our oceans were half their size, we would have less than one-quarter of the rainfall we receive now—not enough to sustain life. If the oceans were just one-eighth bigger, we would be flooded. All those percentages and balances didn’t just *happen* that way—they were *designed* that way. God is definitely interested in Earth.

We are at the center of life in our galaxy, and it’s a pretty large galaxy. If you could hop on a ray of light going 186,000 miles per second, it would take you one-and-a-half seconds to shoot past the moon, seven-and-a-half minutes to go past the sun, and four hours to get to Pluto. It would take almost four-and-a-half years for you to get to the nearest neighboring star, Alpha Centauri, and 100,000 years to go from one end of the Milky Way to the other. And we’re told that there are a hundred billion galaxies beyond ours. Those numbers are big, but God is

bigger. Earth may be a speck in the middle of that vast expanse, but He made conditions for life on Earth just right for carbon-based life: us.

Up to this point, everything God created was a prelude to His crowning creation—mankind. The human race took center stage in the universe for God’s eternal purpose and redemptive plan—and it still does.

Imago Dei

We are now presented with a plurality of relationships in the Godhead: “Let Us make man in Our image” (v. 26). This simple statement provides our first glimpse of the Trinity. This isn’t the *royal we* (as once popularized by Queen Victoria), but the *Sovereign We*, as in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit having a little conversation, an inter-Trinitarian dialogue about the creation of mankind.

The Bible states clearly the unique nature of the Oneness of God: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4). At the same time, the Bible reveals God as a Trinity, triune in nature, and here we see that all three Persons were involved in creation. This isn’t by any means a full revelation of the doctrine of the Trinity, but it’s an undeniable reference to plurality within the Godhead, and it lays the groundwork for a progressive revelation—a further and more precise unfolding of the three distinct Persons that exist as one God.

The word translated “God” in verse 26 is the Hebrew term *Elohim*, the same as in 1:1. While plural in form, it is singular in usage. And although the text records God as saying, “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image,” it then says, “So God created man in *His* own image” (v. 27). God was not speaking to angels; they are a part of the creation and didn’t create anything. God was speaking to Himself here—the three members of the Trinity convening, communicating, and consulting together.

Try as you may, you’re never going to get your mind fully around the Trinity. It’s one of the imponderables of Scripture. Just when you think you’ve got it—that the Trinity is like an apple, or an egg, or the states of water—you dig in more, and your analogy unravels. Some of these illustrations can be helpful, but they are limited. For example,

time can exist in three different dimensions. It can be yesterday, it can be today, and it can be tomorrow—it just depends on your point of reference. God, however, exists outside of time, and His point of reference is one we can't experience. So when the Bible teaches that there is one God existing in three distinct Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—it's impossible to fully explain or fathom, but it is true.

Rather than try to understand how the Trinity *works*, my encouragement is that you enjoy the Trinity's *work* in your life. You can live with the tension of not comprehending the Trinity as long as you enjoy the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Each member of the Trinity took an active part in creation. The Father was the sovereign architect of creation. He conceived of, planned, and decreed it. The Son, Jesus Christ, was the builder. Paul wrote, "There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things...and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things" (1 Corinthians 8:6). Creation was of the Father, but it was through Jesus. The first verses of John's Gospel agree, echoing Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-3).

The Father was the architect and Jesus was the builder, and the Holy Spirit was the project manager. He's the one who ensured the security of it all as it was being carried out: "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2). "Hovering" is the same term used in Deuteronomy 32:11 of a mother eagle brooding over and ensuring the safety of her young in the nest. That's the Trinity at creation, all working together. While it's hard to wrap our minds around how the Trinity works, we can clearly see all three at work together and in harmony in the act of creation.

Now, what does it mean to be made in God's image? Clearly, this description is unique to humanity. Though we share many biological features and functions with the animal kingdom, for example, we don't share this distinction. So the "image of God" must refer to spiritual or moral attributes. For one thing, it means we are rational creatures (mostly). When my dog does little things in response to my voice,

I think, *Oh, look what he's doing; he's thinking this or that*. He's probably not. He can't communicate with me the way you and I can with God. We can reason; we can apply intellect and logic and come to conclusions. Animals can't do those things.

Also, the Bible indicates that we are tripartite beings composed of body, soul, and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23). We have three natures, similar to God. In all of creation, we alone are made in His image; we alone reflect our creator. That elevates us above the rest of creation. The likeness, however, has dimmed. Those wrinkles? Those gray hairs? That achy spine and those stiff joints? That's not what God originally had in mind.

If you want to see what God fully intended, look at Jesus Christ. Perfect. Flawless. Sinless. One day we will be resurrected and restored, fully reflecting the idea that God had for humanity from the beginning. We will truly be made in His image.

Our Maker's Mandate

When God made animals—sea creatures, land animals, birds—He blessed them, telling them, “Be fruitful and multiply” (v. 22). When He made people, though, not only did He bless them and tell them to be fruitful and multiply, but to “fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over” all the living creatures He had made (v. 28).

Humans, then, have a unique relationship to the universe God made. They are to *subdue* it and *have dominion over* it. This verse is like a Magna Carta for scientific research and development: God gave us permission to investigate and harness the world's potential. It's as if He said, “Get a handle on the earth and use it for your benefit; find out what I put in it.” A great proverb says, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter” (Proverbs 25:2). God has packed so much into His creation! We are to apply our minds to finding out how to wisely harness it for human benefit and God's glory.

Knowing that His crowning human creation needed fuel, God provided a menu some would find anticlimactic: “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; to you it shall be for food” (Genesis 1:29). God initially assigned a vegan diet. This doesn’t mean that God wants people to be plant-based eaters only. The teeth in your mouth bear testimony that you were designed to tear and grind more substantive forms of protein. This was just the beginning, and God graciously supplied fruits and vegetables as the first food source for both people and animals. After the fall, animals were to be used for food (Genesis 9:3). So I don’t see a problem with hunting or fishing for sustenance. However, having dominion over God’s creation does not include slaughter just for the sake of pride or greed. God wants us to take care of what He has given us, even as we explore and rule over it.

At the end of the six days of creation, the formless, void glob became a glorious, astonishing globe. Seven times in this chapter, God used the word *good* to describe what He had made. And now, at the end of the creation sequence, He called it all “*very good*” (1:31). It’s worth noting His satisfaction, because soon God would call something “*not good*.”