

*A Comprehensive Verse-by-Verse Exploration of the Bible*

GENESIS to REVELATION

**GENESIS**

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(Words denoted with a \* in the text appear in the Glossary.)

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*And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light (1:3).*

# 1

## CREATION

*Genesis 1–3*

### DIMENSION ONE: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

*Answer these questions by reading Genesis 1*

1. Who creates the heavens and the earth? (Genesis 1:1)
2. What is the earth like when God begins creating?  
(Genesis 1:2)
3. What does God create on each of the first six days?

<i>Day</i>	<i>What God creates on this day</i>
One	(Genesis 1:3-5)
Two	(Genesis 1:6-8)
Three	(Genesis 1:9-13)
Four	(Genesis 1:14-19)
Five	(Genesis 1:20-23)
Six	(Genesis 1:24-27)

4. What does God command the first creatures to do?  
(Genesis 1:22)

5. What position do the human beings occupy in creation?  
(Genesis 1:28)
  
6. After God creates the human beings on the sixth day,  
what does God think of creation? (Genesis 1:31)

*Answer these questions by reading Genesis 2*

7. What does God do to the seventh day? Why? (Genesis 2:3)
  
8. From what does God make the first man? How does God give the man life? (Genesis 2:7)
  
9. Where does God put the man? (Genesis 2:8)
  
10. What command does God give the man when God places him in the garden? What will happen if the man disobeys the command? (Genesis 2:16-17)
  
11. When God decides that it is not good for the man to be alone, what does God do first? (Genesis 2:18-19)
  
12. From what does God make the first woman?  
(Genesis 2:21-22)
  
13. According to God's instructions, what takes place when a man and woman unite? (Genesis 2:24)

*Answer these questions by reading Genesis 3*

14. What does the serpent tempt the woman to do?  
(Genesis 3:1-5)
  
15. What knowledge comes to the man and the woman  
when they eat the fruit? (Genesis 3:7)
  
16. When they hear the sound of God in the garden, what  
do they do? (Genesis 3:8)
  
17. Whom does God question first? (Genesis 3:9)
  
18. What does God do to the serpent who tempted the  
woman? (Genesis 3:14)
  
19. What is the woman's punishment? (Genesis 3:16)
  
20. What is the man's punishment? (Genesis 3:17-19)
  
21. What does God make for the man and the woman  
before sending them out of the garden? (Genesis 3:21)

## DIMENSION TWO: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN?

- **Genesis 1:1.** We can translate the opening sentence of the Bible in many different ways. The New International Version translates it, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Other translations attempt to show the dynamism of this act. The New English Bible translates, “In the beginning of creation, when God made heaven and earth.” The 1985 English edition of *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*, published by the Jewish Publication Society, reads, “When God began to create heaven and earth.” These translations show us that Creation is something dynamic. God introduces a process that begins with Creation.
- **Genesis 1:2.** The second verse shows us that God calls into being a swirling, watery chaos—lacking all order and capacity for sustaining life. The Hebrew word translated “the deep”\* refers to this watery chaos that exists before God speaks and begins the process of establishing the creation as we know it.
- **Genesis 1:3.** The first act of Creation is the commanding word that light appear. This appearance of light, before God creates the sun, troubles many readers. The ancient Israelites distinguished between the light of day and the light of the sun. After all, they observed that on cloudy days, when the sun was not shining, light was still visible. So the sun was not the same thing as day, but was a characteristic of the daytime. The sun distinguished between day and night.
- **Genesis 1:5.** You may find it difficult to imagine God’s making the whole creation in only six days. Through the centuries, many interpreters have thought that the length of the day at the time of Creation was much longer than the twenty-four hours of our day. That thought seems highly improbable. The Hebrew writer was thinking of a day of the usual length, beginning at sunset and ending at sunset on the following day. The fact that God created the world

in less than a week is one way of showing God's remarkable power.

■ **Genesis 1:6-10.** The early Israelite and most of the people of the ancient Near East envisioned the world as an inverted bowl. This bowl separated the heavens from the earth and the underworld. The earth rested upon pillars that extended down into the deep waters below earth. This same firmament\* or "expanse" kept the swirling waters in the heavens from flooding the earth.

■ **Genesis 1:26.** The phrase, "Let us make man in our image" gives interpreters difficulty. Surely, God is not speaking of other gods who assist him in the Creation; that would be polytheism. Other commentators suggest that this phrase refers to the Trinity. Of the many explanations offered, the best one seems to be that God is surrounded by beings who do his bidding. They make up the divine assembly\* in the heavens. We read about this divine assembly in Chapter 1 of Job and in Psalm 82.

■ **Genesis 2:4.** Did you notice that Genesis 1 uses the general name *God*? But beginning with 2:4 the text speaks of *the LORD God*. These two terms, *LORD* and *God*, combine two ways of referring to God that we shall meet often in the Book of Genesis. The word translated "the LORD" is the ancient personal name for the deity, which in Hebrew is *Yahweh*.\* The other word is the general term for God, which in Hebrew is *Elohim*.\* A combination of the two is unusual, and it may point to two different traditions about the Creation that have been woven together. The combination *Yahweh Elohim* ("the LORD God") is not used after Genesis 3.

■ **Genesis 2:8-14.** The word *Eden*\* means "delight" or "garden of God." In verses 10 through 14 the four rivers probably are the Nile,\* the Tigris,\* the Euphrates,\* and (less certainly) the Ganges in India.

■ **Genesis 2:20.** In ancient Israel, to name something defined and fixed its nature and character. Names expressed the essential features of that which was named. In giving the



man the ability to name, God also gives the power to define and fix the very nature of these creatures of earth.

■ **Genesis 3:24.** The cherubim\* placed at the east of the garden to guard the tree of life were winged creatures that belonged to God's heavenly council. The word is plural. We do not know how many stood guard over Eden.

## DIMENSION THREE: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN TO ME?

Dimension Three provides three major ideas that have meaning for our lives today.

### *Genesis 1:1–2:3—The Bible and Science*

Relating the findings of science to the Creation story in Genesis puzzles many persons. Often persons too easily say either that Genesis 1 has nothing to do with science because it is a religious story, or that the story of Creation in the Bible contradicts the findings of modern science. Neither is quite right.

The Genesis story is good science for the time in which it was written. It explains how the world as we know it came into being at the bidding of a pre-existing reality. The Genesis story shows that everything in all the world draws its being from, and has its continued existence through, God's action. Scientific explanations of the development of life on our planet or within our solar system correspond fairly well with the biblical story.

The Genesis story is not in basic conflict with scientific theories because the Bible's account focuses on God's relationship to his creation. The story is one of fundamental religious significance, born in faith and nurtured in faith. Have you had difficulty reconciling the biblical account of Creation with scientific theories?

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). What does this sentence say about our world? What does it say about God’s relationship to our world? What does it say about the people in our world? What does it say about you?

### *Genesis 2:4-17—Personal Relationship With God*

As you read Genesis 2:4-17, you probably realized that this account of Creation differs from the one in Genesis 1. Many biblical scholars think the stories were written by two different persons or groups, each stressing particular features of the story of Creation. Perhaps a third group or individual combined the two stories. If this is the case, the present accounts of Creation found in the two chapters of Genesis give two important aspects of the Creation, each valuable in its own right. Genesis 1 tells the story in an orderly and measured way, giving great attention to detail. Genesis 2 gives us a more intimate picture of the first human pair and the ideal life they initially had with God in the garden.

But both stories are examples of sublime faith in the living God, the source and ground of life and its meaning. Both stories also place human beings at the center of God’s concern and show that God lays a great responsibility upon the human community. We are to care for the whole of God’s universe. The human being is responsible to God in a unique way. What insights into your personal relationship with God do you gain from Genesis 2:4-17 that you did not gain from Genesis 1–2:3?

### *Genesis 3—Original Sin*

Genesis 3 tells how sin comes into the world. What is the sin of the woman and the man? The Hebrew text of Genesis 3:6 reads “she also gave some to her husband, who was with her.” The serpent tempts the woman, and the man

who stands with her is tempted at the same time and in the same way. Human history begins with temptation in this account. Genesis 3 does not explain the origin of sin. It does relate sin to realities outside us (the serpent), and also to realities within our minds and hearts. Sin arises from without us and from within us. It affects us all.

Many persons throughout the history of the Christian church believed that Adam's sin infected the whole of history thereafter. Does the Genesis story support this idea? If so, how does the sin of the first human pair affect later generations? How do we transmit sin?

The best explanation of the mystery of sin seems to be that every generation and every individual re-enacts the first sin. Each generation begins with the same gracious God that we see in Genesis 3. The story in Genesis 3 helps us see how sin is the free act of the first human pair, yet at the same time an act that has some of its origin outside the realm of human freedom. The mystery of sin is there, and where people are, sin is. Why do you think the writer of Genesis included this story? How do you interpret the story of Eden, of life in the garden?



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Exploration of the Bible*

# GENESIS

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