

# Creation and Blessing: An Expository Study of the Book of Genesis

July, 2011

## The Story of the Creation

Key Observation: As we study the book of Genesis, we must remember that no one witnessed the creation.

***Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth! Tell Me, if you have understanding, who set its measurements, since you know? Or who stretched the line on it? Or where were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4-7).***

There are only two viable options as to where Genesis 1:1 (and the rest of the book) came from.

Either it was a product of a human author's imagination, or it is divinely revealed truth. If it is the former, we should value it only as a work of antiquity, on the same level as other ancient accounts of how the world came into being. If the latter, we must come on bended knee, willing to hear and obey it as an authoritative word from God.

## I. Purpose of the Book

A. To present man's rebellion against his Maker and its terrible consequences

B. To provide the historical basis for the covenant of promise with Abraham whereby God will graciously bring about the solution to man's revolt

C. To encourage faith in Jehovah by introducing His election and separation of Israel to Himself as a resolution of the terrible consequences of mankind's rebellion.

## II. Theme of the Book

Genesis shows how God sovereignly chose the nation of Israel as the means through which He would bless all the nations of the earth.

### **III. Key Words:**

Genesis is the book of beginnings and the book of blessings.

### **IV. Key Phrase:**

“...and in you all the nations of the earth be blessed” (six times).

### **V. Key Verses:**

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

Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”

Genesis 12:1-3: “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

### **VI. Key Lesson:**

God created us for blessings and chose us to be a blessing to the world.

## **VII. The Outline in a Nutshell**

1. The Origin of the Universe: Four Great Events (Genesis 1-11)
  - A. Creation (Genesis 1-2)
  - B. Fall (Genesis 3-5)

- C. Flood (Genesis 6-9)
- D. Confusion of Tongues (Genesis 10-11)
- 2. The Origin of the Hebrew Nation: Four Great Men (Genesis 12-50)
  - A. Abraham (Genesis 12-24)
  - B. Isaac (Genesis 25-26)
  - C. Jacob (Genesis 27-36)
  - D. Joseph (Genesis 37-50)

### **VIII. Summary of the Book**

Moses wrote the book of Genesis. Chronologically speaking, it is interesting to note that the first three chapters of Genesis cover over a third of the Bible's history! God has packed a lot of time into three chapters of the Bible.

Genesis can be easily divided into two main sections. The first section, chapters 1-11, has to do with the physical universe and with creation, but in the last part, chapters 12-50, God begins to personally deal with man and with His chosen people. God was more interested in Abraham than He was in the entire created universe. This tells me is that God is more interested in us and attaches more value to you and me than He does to the entire

physical universe. God emphasizes the value of His human creation over the physical universe throughout the book of Genesis.

## **VIX. Genesis 1:1-2**

There is no other way to approach the book of Genesis but to recognize that our God is awesome. Carefully read these words: **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”** (1:1) There are two purposes in this opening statement: (1) to identify God as the Creator and (2) to explain the origin of the world. The origin does not imply that absolutely nothing existed or had happened before this. The separate creation of angels and other heavenly beings is already assumed (see 1:26).

The first three words in our English Bible (**“In the beginning”**) translate a single Hebrew word *bereshit*. This word does not necessarily connote a brief period of time. This means the Bible never intended for us to pinpoint the age of the universe. We cannot say for certain when God created the universe or how long He took to create it. He may have taken billions of years or He may have taken six 24-hour days. The biblical text does not satisfy our raging curiosity. It simply says, **“In the beginning God...”**

The key issue is not when the universe was created; the issue is who created the universe.

God created the earth, the universe, and everything that exists. This fact is certain. Several years ago a scientist wrote an article entitled, *Seven Reasons Why I Believe in God*. He argued his case as follows:

1. *Consider the rotation of the earth. Our globe spins on its axis at the rate of one thousand miles an hour. If it were just a hundred miles an hour, our days and nights would be ten times as long. The vegetation would freeze in the long night or it would burn in the long day; and there could be no life.*
2. *Consider the heat of the sun. Twelve thousand degrees at surface temperature, and we're just far enough away to be blessed by that terrific heat. If the sun gave off half its radiation, we would freeze to death. If it gave off one half more, we would all be crispy critters.*
3. *Consider the twenty-three degree slant of the earth. If it were different than that, the vapors from the oceans would ice over the continents. There could be no life.*
4. *Consider the moon. If the moon were fifty thousand miles away rather than its present distance, twice each day giant tides would inundate every bit of land mass on this earth.*
5. *Consider the crust of the earth. Just a little bit thicker and there could be no life because there would be no oxygen.*
6. *Consider the thinness of the atmosphere. If our atmosphere was just a little thinner, the millions of meteors now burning themselves out in space would plummet this earth into oblivion.*
7. *Finally, the fact that man is capable of grasping the idea of the existence of God is in itself sufficient evidence.*

In 1:2, Moses writes, "The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters."

First, we must note that the word "earth" (*eretz*) can be translated either "earth" or "land." In this context, the translation "land" is preferred. When we hear the word "earth" in our scientific age, we generally think of the big jewel we are on which orbits around the sun. But the term did not generally

suggest such a meaning to those in the pre-space-age time when Genesis was written, for they did not generally know of the “global” dimensions of the planet. Thus, the term “earth,” (*eretz*) in Genesis, does not usually refer to the entire planet, but to a specific section of *land*.

Second, the phrase “**formless and void**” is a Hebrew figure of speech that uses two independent words connected by “and” to express a single concept. For example, “nice and warm” means “nicely warm.” The word “**formless**” means undeveloped, like a blank chalkboard. The word “**void**” means that the land had no people on it (cf. [Isa 45:18](#)). Thus, the phrase means the land was yet unfashioned and uninhabited

To summarize: 1:1 explains the origin of the universe and 1:2 pictures the land before God prepared it for human beings. Light is needful for man. Ground is needed instead of seas. There has to be a provision of rain. The sky has to come into being. Vegetation has to be created for people. The sun and the moon are for people to tell time. The animals are for humankind.

How did this shaping of creation for the human race take place? “**The Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.**” God used the Holy Spirit to prepare the world for the human race. Since this is the first reference to the Holy Spirit in the Bible, it gives us an idea what He will always do. The Holy Spirit is the One that gives life, the One who gives form and direction to our lives.

It is interesting that salvation also follows a similar pattern to what we find here. When God first comes to us He finds our lives empty and without shape or purpose. Then He speaks into our lives. His Spirit moves upon us. This is what Paul declares in [2 Corinthians 4:6](#): “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” God’s ways of working in creation and salvation are similar. Salvation is His restoration of creation, using a similar pattern. God comes to us in our emptiness. He finds our darkness, emptiness, and hopelessness. His creative Word brings life to us. Again, Paul says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.<sup>25</sup> The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” ([2 Cor 5:17](#), ESV).<sup>26</sup>

The implications of this are great.

***First, if God is the Creator of all things out of nothing, then He owns all things and all people absolutely*** ([Ps 24:1](#); [89:11](#); [95:5](#)). God owns all things absolutely.

***A second implication of the doctrine of creation is that everything that exists has a purpose, a goal, and a reason for being.***

***The final implication is that everything that exists must be under God's control.*** The creation must be in subjection to the Creator.

## **Genesis 1-2: A Biblical Perspective**

As we seek to accurately interpret the first two chapters of Genesis, we must strive to honestly respond to the following questions:

**1. What is the purpose of the Pentateuch?** The purpose of the Pentateuch (i.e., the first five books of the Bible) is found in one very important event: the covenant between God and Israel, established at Mount Sinai (Exodus-Deuteronomy). This covenant relates directly back to God's initial desire to bless the human race through the descendants of Abraham ([Gen 12:1-3](#)). Yet, we know from reading the Pentateuch that this covenant failed on account of Israel's failure to trust God and obey His will ([Num 14:22-23](#); [20:12](#); [Deut 34:1-12](#)). Fortunately, the author goes on to demonstrate that God's promise to restore the blessing will one day succeed, because God Himself promised to give Israel a heart that would trust and obey Him ([Deut 30:1-10](#)). Therefore, the entire Pentateuch looks to the future as the time when God's faithful promise would ultimately be fulfilled.

**2. What is the purpose(s) of the book of Genesis?** There are at least three purposes of Genesis: (1) to connect the God of the Sinai Covenant with the God who created the world; (2) to link the call of the patriarchs and the Sinai Covenant with the goal of the ultimate reestablishment of God's original purpose in creation; and (3) to tie the individuals and events of the Pentateuch account to future revelation (typology).

**3. What is the purpose(s) of [Genesis 1](#) and [2](#)?** A close study of [Genesis 1-2](#) reveals that Moses was mainly concerned about three specific subjects: (1) God, (2) man/woman, and (3) the land. He tells us that God is owner of the land; He created and prepared it, and He can give it to whomever He chooses ([Jer 27:5](#)).

**4. What expectations do we bring to [Genesis 1 and 2](#)?** In our attempt to answer this question, we must be able to acknowledge our preconceived notions and expectations and be willing to part with any excess baggage we may be carrying. The following four faulty expectations seem most relevant:

***First, we expect to be able to mix and match the creation account with our scientific bias.*** The vast majority of interpretive views attempt to do justice to both the Bible and science (not necessarily in that order). This is frequently done by combining exegesis of the Hebrew text with recent scientific theories and conclusions. (What I call “the mix and match approach.”) Yet, there are several problems with this approach. (1) All too often we allow our modern, scientific views of the world to determine what we understand the biblical writers to be saying. But the primary question for any interpreter must always be, “What does the text say?” Although science and history may provide interesting and helpful insights, the focus of all interpretation must be the text itself. We must always remember, the Genesis account is not dependent upon a “proper” understanding of science. After all, the discoveries that have been made and our understanding of science is relatively recent in origin. What must interpreters have done with the Genesis account before the age of enlightenment? That is a question worth pondering. (2) Scientific research is forever in a state of shifting sand. While the Word of God is stayed upon the Rock, scientific conclusions are always disputable and dependent upon further data. Of course, some will say, “Well, the same could be said of hermeneutics” (the science of biblical interpretation). Yet there is a significant difference. Modern science does not hold the answer to the meaning of the biblical text. Rather, the Bible is the inspired and authoritative Word of God (His special, unique revelation) and science is our pursuit of God in His general revelation.

While it is true, on this side of heaven, both sciences will remain ultimately inconclusive (due to the finite, sinful mind of man), there is much more to be said for our illuminating ability to understand and accurately interpret the Word. A truly legitimate view must be one that could have “worked” before the rise of science and its use in biblical interpretation.

***Second, we expect to be able to study the creation account in our own historical context.*** Granted, this particular error is all too common and very easy to commit. The truth is, most students of the Word adopt a

perspective that is close to home and timely (e.g., a western, 21<sup>st</sup> century hermeneutic). While this is difficult to change, we must both acknowledge this to be true and wrestle with the honesty of our interpretive skills.

In the case of the book of Genesis, the background is that of those who first received this book. This background is vital to our grasp of the meaning and message of creation. Assuming Moses to be the author of Genesis, the book most likely would have been written sometime after the exodus and before the entrance into the land of Canaan. So, before we approach the question of what the creation should mean to us, we must deal with its meaning for those who first read these inspired words from the pen of Moses. The initial purpose of this account was for the Israelites of Moses' day. What was the situation at the time of the writing of this creation account? Who received this revelation and what needs were to be met by it? What should they have learned? How should they have responded? The ability to answer these questions is crucial to rightly interpreting and applying the message of the creation.

***Third, we expect to be able to use the creation account for apologetic purposes.*** While this may be of some value, this is not in keeping with the author's purpose for writing. Genesis was written to the people of God, not unbelievers. Men who refuse to believe in creationism do not do so for lack of facts or proof (cf. [Rom 1:18ff](#)), or due to their greater knowledge ([Ps 14:1](#)), but due to a lack of faith ([Heb 11:3](#)). Genesis is much more of a declaration than a defense. After all, [Genesis 1:1](#) assumes God's existence (c.f. "In the beginning was God..."). The author sees no need for further evidence.

***Fourth, we expect to find in the creation account the answers to mysteries that may or may not be explained elsewhere.*** We may wish to learn, for example, the age of the earth, how and when God created either the universe or man, or just where Satan's fall and judgment fits into the creation account, but may not be given such information because it was not the purpose of the author to answer such questions. The problem is that these chapters were not intended to give us an account of the creation that would answer all of the scientific problems and phenomenon. It simply wasn't the purpose of the author. There is an air of mystery that permeates these two chapters. We must be satisfied with that realization.

(1) *The focus of [Genesis 1:1](#)—2:3 is not on the “ultimate beginning” of all things, but rather on the beginning of the world as we know it, and especially on man’s beginning – the origins of the human race.* Scholars attempt to explain this in a variety of ways, but the end result is that Genesis doesn’t really start at the absolute beginning. For one thing, there is no absolute beginning for God, Who is eternal. For another, we know that certain beings were already in existence at the time God created the heavens and the earth. At the beginning of [Genesis 3](#), Satan appears, and at the end, we find angels (3:24), yet [Genesis 1](#) and 2 do not mention the creation of Satan, or of angels. I believe Genesis is the account of man’s beginnings, of Israel’s beginnings, and the beginning of God’s redemptive program for man. It would seem, then, that before the events of [Genesis 1](#) and 2, the creation and the fall of Satan had already occurred, yet they are only alluded to later on in Scripture ([Isaiah 14:12-14](#); [Ezekiel 28:12-15](#)). God does not wish for us to be overly intrigued with Satan’s origins or his fall (see [Romans 16:19](#)).

(2) *The creation account does not describe the creation of the world in terms of being made out of nothing, but in terms of beauty and order being created out of a chaotic mess.* Many scholars stress the fact that the Hebrew word that is used in [Genesis 1:1](#) is one that means to create ex nihilo, that is to create something out of nothing. Now I don’t doubt that the original creation was brought into existence out of nothing, because that is what the writer to the Hebrews tells us:

(3) *The creation account of [Genesis 1](#) and 2 is the description of a process that took place over a period of time.* Now don’t get nervous. I did not say that creation took place over a period of millions of years (though there are surely those who believe this); I said that creation took place through a process that occurred over a period of time – six days, according to Moses. I fear that Christians are so defensive about the subject of evolution (which speaks in terms of a process over millions of years) that they fail to recognize what the Bible says. God did transform chaos into cosmos by means of a process that lasted six days.

---