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Published by Zondervan
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530, U.S.A.

www.zondervan.com

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 2008931706

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Printed in the United States of America

08 09 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 /DSC/ 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19

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Introduction to
GENESIS

First, God. God is the subject of life. God is foundational for living. If we don't have a sense of the primacy of God, we will never get it right, get life right, get our lives right. Not God at the margins; not God as an option; not God on the weekends. God at center and circumference; God first and last; God, God, God.

Genesis gets us off on the right foot. Genesis pulls us into a sense of reality that is God-shaped and God-filled. It gives us a vocabulary for speaking accurately and comprehensively about our lives, where we come from and where we are going, what we think and what we do, the people we live with and how to get along with them, the troubles we find ourselves in and the blessings that keep arriving.

Genesis uses words to make a foundation that is solid and true. Everything we think and do and feel is material in a building operation in which we are engaged all our life long. There is immense significance in everything that we do. Our speech and our actions and our prayers are all, every detail of them, involved in this vast building operation comprehensively known as the kingdom of God. But we don't build the foundation. The foundation is given. The foundation is firmly in place.

Jesus concluded his most famous teach-

ing by telling us that there are two ways to go about our lives—we can build on sand or we can build on rock. No matter how wonderfully we build, if we build on sand it will all fall to pieces like a house of cards. We build on what is already there, on the rock. Genesis is a verbal witness to that rock: God acts creatively; God intervenes and graciously judges, God calls us to a life of faith, God makes covenant with us.

But Genesis presents none of this to us as an abstract, bloodless “truth” or “principle.” Instead we are given a succession of stories with named people, people who loved and quarreled, believed and doubted, had children and married, experienced sin and grace. If we pay attention, we find that we ourselves are living variations on these very stories: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his sons, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Joseph and his brothers. The stories show clearly that we are never outsiders or spectators to anything in “heaven and earth.” God doesn't work impersonally from space; he works with us where we are, as he finds us.

No matter what we do, whether good or bad, we continue to be part of everything that God is doing. Nobody can drop out—there's no place to drop out to. So we may as well get started and take our place in the story—at the beginning.

GENESIS *at a Glance*

- | | |
|----------|---|
| Author | ► Moses |
| Audience | ► God's chosen people, the Israelites |
| Date | ► Probably between 1446 and 1406 B.C. |
| Theme | ► Genesis is a book of beginnings that introduces central themes of the Bible, such as creation and redemption. |

NIV
GENESIS

The Beginning

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was ^a formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

⁶And God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.” ⁷So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸God called the expanse “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

⁹And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

¹¹Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, ac-

^a 2 Or possibly *became*

THE MESSAGE
GENESIS

Heaven and Earth

1.1-2 **1** First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don’t see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God’s Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

1.3-5 God spoke: “Light!”
 And light appeared.
 God saw that light was good
 and separated light from dark.
 God named the light Day,
 he named the dark Night.
 It was evening, it was morning—
 Day One.

1.6-8 God spoke: “Sky! In the middle of the waters;
 separate water from water!”
 God made sky.
 He separated the water under sky
 from the water above sky.
 And there it was:
 he named sky the Heavens;
 It was evening, it was morning—
 Day Two.

1.9-10 God spoke: “Separate!
 Water-beneath-Heaven, gather into one
 place;
 Land, appear!”
 And there it was.
 God named the land Earth.
 He named the pooled water Ocean.
 God saw that it was good.

1.11-13 God spoke: “Earth, green up! Grow all
 varieties
 of seed-bearing plants,
 Every sort of fruit-bearing tree.”

1:1 A summary statement introducing the six days of creative activity. The truth of this majestic verse was joyfully affirmed by poet (Ps 102:25) and prophet (Isa 40:21). *In the beginning God*. The Bible always assumes, and never argues, God’s existence. Although everything else had a beginning, God has always been (Ps 90:2). *In the beginning*. Jn 1:1–10, which stresses the work of Christ in creation, opens with the same phrase. *God created*. The Hebrew noun *Elohim* is plural but the verb is singular, a normal usage in the OT when reference is to the one true God. This use of the plural expresses intensification rather than number and has been called the plural of majesty, or of potentiality. In the OT the Hebrew verb for “create” is used only of divine, never of human, activity, *the heavens and the earth*. “All things” (Isa 44:24). That God created everything is also taught in Ecc 11:5; Jer 10:16; Jn 1:3; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2. The positive, life-oriented teaching of v. 1 is beautifully summarized in Isa 45:18.

1:2 *earth*. The focus of this account. *formless and empty*. The phrase, which appears elsewhere only in Jer 4:23, gives structure to the rest of the chapter (see note on v. 11). God’s “separating” and “gathering” on days 1–3 gave form, and his “making” and “filling” on days 4–6 removed the emptiness. *darkness...the waters*. Completes the picture of a world awaiting God’s light-giving, order-making and life-creating word. *and*. Or “but.” The awesome (and, for ancient man, fearful) picture of the original state of the visible creation is relieved by the majestic announcement that the mighty Spirit of God hovers over creation. The announcement anticipates God’s creative words that follow. *Spirit of God*. He was active in creation, and his creative power continues today (see Job 33:4; Ps 104:30). *hovering over*. Like an eagle that provides for and protects its young (see Dt 32:11; Isa 31:5). The imagery may also suggest the winged sun disk, which throughout the ancient Near East was a symbol of divine majesty.

1:3 *God said*. Merely by speaking, God brought all things into being (Ps 33:6,9; 148:5; Heb 11:3). *Let there be light*. God’s first creative word called forth light in the midst of the primeval darkness. Light is necessary for making God’s creative works visible and life possible. In the OT it is also symbolic of life and blessing (see 2Sa 22:29; Job 3:20; 30:26; 33:30; Ps 49:19; 56:13; 97:11; 112:4; Isa 53:11; 58:8,10; 59:9; 60:1,3). Paul uses this word to illustrate God’s re-creating work in sin-darkened hearts (2Co 4:6).

1:11 *God said*. This phrase is used twice on the third day (vv. 9,11) and three times (vv. 24,26,29) on the sixth day. These two days are climactic, as the following structure of ch. 1 reveals (see note on v. 2 regarding “formless and empty”):

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ording to their various kinds.” And it was so. ¹²The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

¹⁴And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

²⁰And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” ²¹So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” ²³And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

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And there it was.
Earth produced green seed-bearing plants,
all varieties,
And fruit-bearing trees of all sorts.
God saw that it was good.
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Three.

1.14-15 God spoke: “Lights! Come out!
Shine in Heaven’s sky!
Separate Day from Night.
Mark seasons and days and years,
Lights in Heaven’s sky to give light to Earth.”
And there it was.

1.16-19 God made two big lights, the larger
to take charge of Day,
The smaller to be in charge of Night;
and he made the stars.
God placed them in the heavenly sky
to light up Earth
And oversee Day and Night,
to separate light and dark.
God saw that it was good.
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Four.

1.20-23 God spoke: “Swarm, Ocean, with fish and all
sea life!
Birds, fly through the sky over Earth!”
God created the huge whales,
all the swarm of life in the waters,
And every kind and species of flying birds.
God saw that it was good.
God blessed them: “Prosper! Reproduce! Fill
Ocean!
Birds, reproduce on Earth!”
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Five.

<i>Days of forming</i>	<i>Days of filling</i>
1. “light” (v. 3)	4. “lights” (v. 14)
2. “water under the expanse . . . water above it” (v. 7)	5. “every living and moving thing with which the water teems . . . every winged bird” (v. 21)
3a. “dry ground” (v. 9)	6a. livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals” (v. 24) 6a ₂ . “man” (v. 26)
3b. “vegetation” (v. 11)	6b. “every green plant for food” (v. 30)

Both the horizontal and vertical relationships between the days demonstrate the literary beauty of the chapter and stress the orderliness and symmetry of God’s creative activity. *kinds*. See vv. 12, 21, 24–25. Both creation and reproduction are orderly.

1:14 *serve as signs*. In the ways mentioned here, not in any astrological or other such sense.

1:17–18 The three main functions of the heavenly bodies.

1:22 *Be fruitful and increase in number*. God’s benediction on living things that inhabit the water and that fly in the air. By his blessing they flourish and fill both realms with life (see note on v. 28). God’s rule over his created realm promotes and blesses life.

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24 And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth,^a and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

29 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

^a 26 Hebrew; Syriac *all the wild animals*

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1.24-25 God spoke: "Earth, generate life! Every sort and kind: cattle and reptiles and wild animals—all kinds."

And there it was:
wild animals of every kind,
Cattle of all kinds, every sort of reptile and bug.
God saw that it was good.

1.26-28 God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."

God created human beings;
he created them godlike,
Reflecting God's nature.
He created them male and female.

God blessed them:
"Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!
Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth."

1.29-30 Then God said, "I've given you every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth
And every kind of fruit-bearing tree,
giving them to you for food.
To all animals and all birds,
everything that moves and breathes,
I give whatever grows out of the ground for food."
And there it was.

1.31 God looked over everything he had made;
it was so good, so very good!
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Six.

1:26 *us...our...our*: God speaks as the Creator-King, announcing his crowning work to the members of his heavenly court (see 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8; see also 1Ki 22:19–23; Job 15:8; Jer 23:18). *image...likeness*: No distinction should be made between "image" and "likeness," which are synonyms in both the OT (5:1; 9:6) and the NT (1Co 11:7; Col 3:10; Jas 3:9). Since man is made in God's image, every human being is worthy of honor and respect; he is neither to be murdered (9:6) nor cursed (Jas 3:9). "Image" includes such characteristics as "righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24) and "knowledge" (Col 3:10). Believers are to be "conformed to the likeness" of Christ (Ro 8:29) and will someday be "like him" (1Jn 3:2). *rule*: Man is the climax of God's creative activity, and God has crowned him "with glory and honor" and made him ruler over the rest of his creation (Ps 8:5–8). Since man was created in the image of the divine King, delegated sovereignty (kingship) was bestowed on him. (For redeemed man's ultimate kingship see notes on Heb 2:5–8).

1:27 This highly significant verse is the first occurrence of poetry in the OT (which is about 40 percent poetry). *created*: The word is used here three times to describe the central divine act of the sixth day (see note on v. 1). *male and female*: Alike they bear the image of God, and together they share in the divine benediction that follows.

1:28 *God blessed them...fill...subdue...Rule*: Man goes forth under this divine benediction—flourishing, filling the earth with his kind, and exercising dominion over the other earthly creatures (see v. 26; 2:15; Ps 8:6–8). Human culture, accordingly, is not anti-God (though fallen man often has turned his efforts into proud rebellion against God). Rather, it is the expression of man's bearing the image of his Creator and sharing, as God's servant, in God's kingly rule. As God's representative in the creaturely realm, he is steward of God's creatures. He is not to exploit, waste or despoil them, but to care for them and use them in the service of God and man.

1:29–30 People and animals seem to be portrayed as originally vegetarian (see 9:3).