

IN THE BEGINNING

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

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AND GOD SAW EVERYTHING

that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished,
and all the host of them.

And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done,
and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done.

—the book of *Genesis* 1:31—2:2



IN THE BEGINNING

The First Book of Moses commonly called

GENESIS

GENESIS 1:1–2:3

1¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

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

⁶ And God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷ And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. ⁸ And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

⁹ And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ And God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. ¹⁷ And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

²⁰And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.” ²¹So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

²⁴And God said, “let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. ²⁵And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” ²⁹And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

2¹Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ²And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. ³So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.



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myth a literary genre

The English word **myth** derives from the Greek μῦθος (*muthos*), which means “story” or “narrative.” A **myth** is a genre of literature that concerns itself with very ancient stories used to explain such inexplicable things as how the earth came to be. Originally these stories did not carry the same negative connotations we now associate with fables and falsehoods. Many Scripture scholars refer to the Creation accounts in the book of *Genesis* as **myths** in the same sense that the popular Christian author C.S. Lewis referred to the story of Jesus Christ as a “true **myth**.” The biblical stories pertaining to Creation depict the truth about the divine origin of all things—the earth, the heavens, and humanity.

AND GOD SAID, ‘LET THERE BE LIGHT’

Link to a free lesson video and other study materials at www.turningtogodsword.com.

The Old Testament begins with the book of *Genesis*, which takes its name from the Greek word γένεσις (*genesis*) that means “an origin” or “coming into being.” The word “genesis,” therefore, often is used to describe the origin or beginning of something. In the Bible, the book of *Genesis* contains ancient Hebrew accounts of how God created the universe. Scholars classify these accounts as myths, a literary term properly used to describe stories that explain the inexplicable. While the accounts of Creation found in the book of *Genesis* display many similarities to other ancient explanations about how the world came to be, they differ in some important theological ways.

Only the inspired accounts in the book of *Genesis* are included in the canon of Sacred Scripture that makes up the living Word of God. When we read the biblical accounts about how the world came into existence, the same God who spoke to our earliest ancestors still speaks to us. As we study the book of *Genesis*, think about what its stories are telling us about God.

What truths do you find in these ancient biblical explanations of the origin of the universe that shape our Christian faith?

1 Read the book of *Genesis* 1:1–2, which tells us that God existed before the heavens and the earth. How is the earth described? In this biblical account of Creation, what surprising element is present before God takes any action? What is the relationship between this element and the darkness? Where is God located relative to the darkness? What point might the author of *Genesis* be trying to make by describing the waters of the deep as having a face?

2 Read the book of *Genesis* 1:3–5. What is created on the first day? What action does God take in order to bring this about? According to the biblical text, what does God think about this newly created thing? Based on this biblical account, what appears to be necessary in order for Creation to occur? Read the *Gospel According to John* 1:1–5. How are the first five verses of the Old Testament similar to the first five verses of the *Gospel According to John*? Consider how the New Testament description of Creation expands understanding about who God is and how God relates to humanity.

FIAT LUX: ‘LET THERE BE LIGHT’

In the *Gospel According to John* 9:5, Jesus announces that he is the light of the world, a powerful statement that necessarily places Jesus at the beginning of Creation. In the prologue to the *Gospel According to John*, the Evangelist makes the equally powerful statement that Jesus is God’s Word, setting up Creation as a dialogue between God and man. At the beginning of Creation described in the book of *Genesis* 1:3, God speaks and there is light. In the *Gospel According to John* 1:4, the Word is equated with light and life. By implication of the Creation story, this light—Jesus Christ—is the framework for all of existence.

THE GOODNESS OF CREATION

“At the beginning of the Bible, what is emphasized is that God is pleased with Creation, stressing repeatedly the beauty and goodness of every single thing. At the end of each day, it is written in the book of *Genesis* that ‘God saw that it was good.’ If God sees Creation as good, then we too must take this attitude. We are the guardians of Creation. When we exploit Creation, we destroy that sign of God’s love. To destroy Creation is to say to God: ‘I don’t care.’ And this is not good. This is sin.

Creation is ours so that we can receive good things from it. We must protect it and not exploit it. God forgives always, we men and women forgive sometimes, but Creation never forgives. If we don’t care for Creation, it will destroy us.”

—Pope Francis
21 May 2014

3 What Christian sacrament requires the same elements as those that appear necessary for Creation in the book of *Genesis* 1:1–5? How is this sacrament related to Creation? If necessary, refer to paragraphs 1214–1215 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In the *Gospel According to John* 1:1–5, what seems to be essential for Creation? What point might the Evangelist John be trying to make about God’s ongoing relationship with humanity?

4 Read the book of *Genesis* 1:6–8, which describes God creating a firmament in the midst of the waters. Explain the place of the waters in the Hebrew view of cosmology. What is the firmament that God creates? What purpose does it serve? How are the waters different from the earth as it is described in the book of *Genesis* 1:2? How is the firmament different from the waters? According to the biblical text, how does God feel about the firmament?

5 Read the book of *Genesis* 1:9–13, which describes how the earth and vegetation came to be on the third day. What raw materials does God use to create the earth? What is the source of the vegetation? What does God do to cause the earth and vegetation to appear? How does God apparently feel about these things? Consider what pattern can be seen emerging from God’s creative process.

waters of the deep abyss; void

In some translations “face of the deep” and “face of the waters” in the book of *Genesis* 1:2 are called the “abyss.” From the Greek ἄβυσσος (*abussos*), abyss means “unfathomably deep” and is used to describe the **waters of the deep** at the time of Creation. These same waters sometimes are referred to as the “void,” a word that means “empty space,” or as “chaos” or “chasm,” words that denote “primordial formlessness.” In the book of *Genesis*, the **waters of the deep** exist before Creation.

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN GOD & MAN

That everything comes to be through water and the Spirit in the book of *Genesis* 1:1–2 draws a parallel between the first Creation and the re-Creation that occurs in the sacrament of Baptism, which also relies on water and the Spirit, and on God’s Word. Even before men and women exist, God provides the means to solve the problem of sin—a problem that threatens to destroy humanity almost from the beginning of time.

The first chapter in the book of *Genesis* sets up a cycle of Creation: God speaks; Creation responds; God sees that the response is good. Creation is understood to come about through a dialogue between God and the world.

The prologue to the *Gospel According to John* 1:1–18 points to Jesus as the Word of God, establishing Jesus’ presence at the events in the first chapter in the book of *Genesis*. Jesus is the Word that God speaks to bring forth Creation. The Spirit of God is God’s breath. All three persons of the Trinity are present at Creation.

After the first seven days described at the beginning in the book of *Genesis*, however, the conversation between God and Creation becomes

one-sided. Creation does not speak the same language as God and does not have the right word with which to answer.

When Jesus is revealed as God’s Word in the *Gospel According to John*, Jesus becomes the point of contact between God and Creation. Because Jesus is both human and divine, Jesus provides men and women with a means of communicating with God. Jesus is the Word that brings forth re-Creation and makes it possible for men and women to participate in the divine life of the Blessed Trinity,

The book of *Genesis* sets the scene for all that follows in salvation history. The Creation account in the first chapter is only the beginning of this dramatic story. Christians do not have to wait in suspense to learn the climactic ending. It can be found in the aptly named book of *Revelation*.

In the meantime, because of the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, humanity has the opportunity of communicating directly with God. Anyone can develop an intimate relationship with the Trinity. What we say to God matters, just as it matters that we listen to what God says to us.

‘LET THERE BE LIGHTS
IN THE FIRMAMENT OF THE HEAVENS’



HEBREW COSMOLOGY

The book of *Genesis* reflects the ancient Hebrew view of the world. The heavens or the sky was seen as a firmament with distinct boundaries. It was placed by God in the midst of the formless waters of the deep. This round firmament was surrounded by water. The earth appeared when God formed the seas by gathering water below the sky into basins. At the ends of the earth, land disappeared and there was only water inhabited by monsters. More waters of the deep were below the earth's surface, which rested on pillars. Above the dome of the sky was more water, which God allowed to fall as rain through holes that he opened in the dome. Above all the water was highest heaven, the dwelling place of God.

fir•ma•ment

the heavens or the sky

Firmament describes “something with distinct spatial boundaries.” The first Creation account in the book of *Genesis* tells of God separating the waters of the deep by means of a created **firmament**, which God calls “heaven.” In some translations this **firmament** is referred to as a dome. God essentially carves out a space in the midst of the waters of the deep. Before Creation, these waters are unfathomable, without boundaries, and uncontained.

CONSIDERATIONS OF TIME & SPACE

One of the more difficult ideas regularly encountered when reading Scripture is that God operates outside of time and space.

In the first chapter in the book of *Genesis*, spatial and temporal boundaries are essential regulatory features of God's Creation. God carves out a space for the world that we live in, and he introduces celestial bodies to allow men and women to mark the passing of time. Both space and time are gifts from the Creator.

Pope Benedict XVI, commenting on the way that *Psalms* 136 echoes the first chapter in the book of *Genesis*, teaches that the gift of time is intended to draw men and women to worship: “In this *Psalms* the principal elements of the created world are summed up, with special insistence on the heavenly bodies, the sun, the moon and the stars, magnificent created things that govern the day and the night. Nothing is said here of the creation of human beings, but they are ever present; the sun and the moon are for them—for men and women—so as to structure human time, setting it in relation to the Creator, especially by denoting the liturgical seasons.”

6 Read the book of *Genesis* 1:14–19. On the fourth day, God creates the sun, the moon, and the stars. According to the book of *Genesis* 1:14, what is the purpose of these celestial bodies? How does God feel about them? Without the sun to measure time, how might it be possible that three days and three nights have passed? What does this suggest about God’s relationship to time? Consider what the three days suggest about God’s relationship to space.

7 Read the book of *Genesis* 1:20–23. What does God create on the fifth day? Where are these newly created things placed? How does God feel about them? The book of *Genesis* 1:22 records that God blesses the things he creates on this day. What are the specific words that God uses? Consider what these passages suggest about the nature of any blessing given by God.

8 Read the book of *Genesis* 1:24–25. What does this passage disclose about what God creates on the sixth day? Consider how God feels about it? What do the things created on the first three days have in common? What do the things created on the second three days have in common? How do the first three days relate to the second three days? What does this pattern tell us about the way God operates?

do•min•ion

sovereignty; rule

The book of *Genesis* 1:28 describes God giving humanity **dominion** over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and every living thing that moves on the earth. It is worth noting that God grants this gift of **dominion** in the form of a blessing upon the human beings who have been created in God’s own image and likeness. Note that while God allows humans **dominion** and rule over all other living creatures on the earth, God creates the celestial bodies in the heavens to rule over time.



A VIEW OF GOD AS A CRAFTSMAN

The first Creation account in the book of *Genesis* views God as a craftsman who has a pattern in mind that he follows when he creates the world. This pattern consists of two sets of three days each. On the first three days, God sets up the framework for his Creation. On the second three days, God goes back and fills in that framework.

On Day One, nothing exists except God and a watery void. The materials used for Creation are water and the Spirit of God, which is alive and moving over the face of the water. The first thing that God does is speak to shed light on his environment.

On Day Two, God gets organized by placing a firmament in the middle of the watery void to serve as his workspace, establishing spatial boundaries.

On Day Three, God causes land to appear and plants to grow.

On Day Four, God adds celestial bodies to his work environment to mark the passage of time. Readers can sense that God is in a playful mood when he decides to throw in some stars.

On Day Five, God fills in the framework of the sea and the sky with swimming fish and flying birds. More evidence that God is having fun can be seen in *Psalms* 104:26, which explains that God made the sea monster Leviathan expressly as a plaything.

On Day Six, God fills in the framework of the land with the animals, and in his final act of Creation, God makes a copy of something he knows. Man and woman are created in God’s own image and likeness to rule over all of Creation. Everything else appears to have been a preparation for this.

Day Seven is set apart from the previous six days. God the craftsman is ready to rest. The seven-day week of Creation sets up a biblical pattern—a cyclical period of time in which the number seven represents completeness but not perfection. Readers instinctively know something more is coming.

Paragraph 302 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the universe was created “in a state of journeying” toward an ultimate perfection to which God has destined it.



9 Read the book of *Genesis* 1:26–31, which tells us that on the sixth day man was created in the image and likeness of God. Read paragraph 705 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to learn what it means that humanity is created in God’s image. How does this differ from being created in God’s likeness? Explain what the book of *Genesis* 1:27 teaches about the gender of God. If necessary, refer to paragraph 370 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. For what purpose does God say that he has created men and women? What words does God use when he blesses newly created humanity? Consider how the way that God feels about humanity differs from the way God has felt about the other newly created things.

10 Read the book of *Genesis* 2:1–3. What does God do on the seventh day that sets it apart from the preceding six days? How is this consistent with the view of God as a craftsman? What does adding a seventh day do to the six-day pattern of Creation? What does this suggest about the ultimate goal of repetitive seven-day weeks? For what purpose might God have created the world? What does the Church teach regarding this in paragraph 760 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*? What is surprising about this Church teaching? Where can evidence of the Church be seen in the first Creation account in the book of *Genesis*?

hal•low to make holy or sacred; to set apart

The Hebrew word for **hallow** can be interchanged with the verb “to bless.” To **hallow** something is to “sanctify” or “consecrate” it, marking it as holy. In the first Creation account in the book of *Genesis*, God **hallows** the seventh day, establishing the concept of holiness as an act of setting apart. By **hallowing** the seventh day, God sets it apart as a sacred time. In the book of *Exodus* 20:8, God commands the Israelites to set apart the seventh day for worship. In the *Gospel According to Matthew* 6:9–13, Jesus gives his followers the “Our Father” (the “Lord’s Prayer”), which includes **hallowing** God’s name and regarding it as holy.

It is of interest that God’s acts of separating the light from the darkness, the waters of the deep with a firmament, and the land from the sea, all serve to **hallow** or set apart the world as a sacred space—a place carved out and distinct from the formlessness of the primordial waters of the deep.

IMAGE & LIKENESS

In the book of *Genesis* 1:26–27, men and women are created in God’s image and after God’s likeness. It can be easy to read over this biblical passage without reflecting on the differences between image and likeness.

Paragraph 705 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “Disfigured by sin and death, man remains ‘in the image of God,’ in the image of the Son, but is deprived ‘of the glory of God,’ of his ‘likeness.’ The promise made to Abraham inaugurates the economy of salvation, at the culmination of which the Son himself will assume that ‘image’ and restore it in the Father’s ‘likeness’ by giving it again its Glory, the Spirit who is ‘the giver of life.’”

God created human beings in his image and likeness, which are not one and the same. An image of God is a picture of God and looks like God. Human beings resemble God in appearance. To be like God and to bear God’s likeness is to function the same way that God does. Though all human beings are created in the image of God, only Jesus is God. Only Jesus is able to function as God. It is only through Jesus that men and women are restored to God’s likeness and able to share in the divine life of the Most Holy Trinity.

WHAT IS ON THE MENU IN PARADISE?

In the book of *Genesis* 1:29–30, God gives to men and women—and to all creatures with the breath of life—all the plants of the earth as food. The point is not that God endorses a vegetarian lifestyle based on a plant-based diet. The point is that consuming animals as food requires the animals to die. At the time of Creation, God makes no provision for killing. Death does not yet exist. It is not yet a fact of life.

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all Scripture is inspired by God

and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,
that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

—the *Second Letter of Paul to Timothy* 3:16–17

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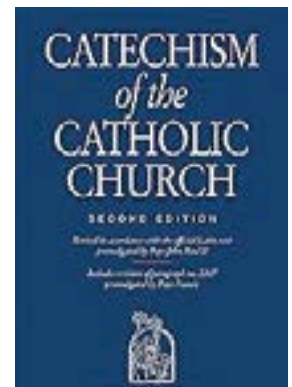
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THE LAND OF CANAAN AT THE TIME OF THE PATRIARCHS

