

Torah Series - Book of Genesis

A. Creation of the Universe and Humanity (1:1–2:3)

The six days of creation and the seventh day of rest.

Introduction & Book Names: Greek origins of the Pentateuch book names

- **Genesis** = Origins. Hebrew: "*Bereshit*" ("In the beginning")
- **Exodus** = The Way Out. Hebrew: "*Shemot*" (Names - who went down to Egypt)
- **Leviticus** = The Levite Book. Hebrew: "*Vayikra*" (And He called - God called to Moses from the Tabernacle)
- **Numbers** = For the Census. Greek: *Arithmoi* Latin: *Numeri*. Hebrew: "*Bamidbar*" ("In the Wilderness")
- **Deuteronomy** = Second Torah. Hebrew: "*Devarim*" (Words - "These are the words that Moses spoke")
- Hebrew names are simply the first word of each book (ex: Genesis is *Bereshit*, meaning "at the head/in the first place").

Genesis 1:1 – "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"

- *Bereshit* emphasizes a summary statement or "in the first place," not strictly chronological time; it introduces what follows.
- *Bara* specifically means "create" (bringing something new into existence), distinct from "make" (*asah*); contrasts with ancient succession myths and affirms one eternal God who creates everything, with no prior gods or worlds.
- Links to John 1:1 ("In the beginning was the Word") and underscores God as Creator of all, not tied to any particular element or place.

Genesis 1:2 – Formless and Void (*Tohu v'Bohu*):

- The earth starts as chaotic/unordered ("formless") and empty of life ("void"); ancient view contrasts "being" with **chaos** - not modern "*material nothingness*."
- Spirit of God "hovers/broods" over the waters (image of a mother bird over eggs, per St. Basil), symbolizing potentiality and anticipation; waters represent **chaos**.
- God resolves two problems: bringing **order out of chaos** and **filling emptiness** with life/relationships (justice/peace).

Genesis 1:3-5 – Day 1: Light and Darkness Separation:

- God creates light, sees it as good, and separates it from darkness (naming day and night); first act of **ordering**.
- Light here is not the sun (created later); some Church Fathers see it as the creation of angels or the uncreated light/glory of God shining into creation (echoed in John's prologue).
- Separation of light/darkness may relate to unfallen vs. fallen angels (not universal among Church Fathers).

Genesis 1:6-8 – Day 2: The 'Firmament' - Water/Sky Separation:

- God creates the *raqia* (firmament/dome-like barrier) to separate waters above from waters below, calling it "heaven" (sky); this forms spaces (day/night, sky/sea) while still empty.
- Waters above/below tied to ancient cosmology (storms, flood imagery later); God's throne/angels above the upper waters.

Genesis 1:9-13 – Day 3: Dry Land separated from Waters:

- God gathers the waters under heaven into one place so dry land appears, naming it Earth and the waters Seas (**restraining chaos** rather than raising land). Then the earth brings forth grass/herbs and fruit trees with seeds according to their kinds.
- God sees it is good. This completes the first set of three days focused on ordering chaos and creating spaces.
- **Parallel Structure of Creation:** The first three days address disorder/chaos by creating spaces (light/dark, sky/sea, land).
- The second three days (4-6) parallel them by filling those spaces with life. This structure is reflected in Holy Saturday vigil (reading first three days, linking to Christ's resurrection on the third day as restoring order/justice).

Genesis 1:14-19 – Day 4: Lights:

- Sun, moon, stars placed in the firmament to divide day/night, for signs/seasons/days/years, and to give light on earth.
- Ancient view: living **angelic beings** ruling over day/night (//humanity's rule over the earth). Connects to angels as God's administration/court; echoed in Revelation (angels as stars) and promises that the righteous will 'shine like stars'. Parallels Day 1.

Genesis 1:20-23 – Day 5: Sky & Water Life:

- Bring forth **sea creatures** (including great sea-monsters) and birds to fill sky and seas, according to their kinds. God blesses them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill their spaces.
- Hebrew literally says "every soul" (living thing = having a soul; different kinds of souls for animals vs. humans, as per St. Gregory Palamas). Parallels Day 2.

Genesis 1:24-25 – Day 6: Land Life:

- Earth brings forth **living creatures** (quadrupeds, creeping things/reptiles, wild animals) according to their kinds.
- Even "chaotic" (sea) or unclean animals are part of God's ordered, beautiful creation ("good"). Parallels Day 3.

Genesis 1:26-28 – Creation of Humanity:

- "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness" with **dominion** over creation. Male and female created together; blessed to be fruitful, multiply, fill/**subdue** (put in order) the earth.
- "Let us" (plural *Elohim*) reflects intensification/'plural of majesty' - plural adds emphasis as the greatest/biggest/best ("God") or distinction from pagan "gods".
- Image/likeness is **dynamic potential/capacity** to imitate and **reflect God** ('like father, like son'), aiming toward likeness. **Radical equality** of male/female as image-bearers in ancient context (women were often viewed as less than men/defective!)

Genesis 1:29-31 – "Good" (Tov) and Vegetarian Diet:

- "Good" means beautiful/wholesome/orderly.
- **Plants** (seed-bearing herbs, fruit trees) given as food for humans and animals – original non-predatory order where creation offers sustenance without killing/death.
- God sees *everything* as very good.

Genesis 2:1-3 – Day 7 / Sabbath:

- Heavens and earth finished with their adornment (spaces filled).
- God **rests** (rather enthroned as King, presiding over ordered creation/kingdom, not mere inactivity/relaxing). Blesses and sanctifies the seventh day.
- Links to future Torah sabbath commands, patriarchs "**resting**" with fathers, and Christ's fulfillment (finishes work on Friday ("it is finished"), rests in tomb on Sabbath, begins new creation on the eighth day/Resurrection).

Key Initial Hermeneutical Notes:

- Key question: how is Genesis **intended** to be understood?
- Creation narrative is conveying theological truths about order (Function) vs. modern science, physics, or a flat-earth dome (Material).
- Affirms creation *ex nihilo* overall in Scripture, but this passage focuses on ordering chaos/potential into ordered/structured existence.
- "Day" as a 24 hour period tricky as sun/moon for seasons do not exist until Day 4.
- Concept of time: God and angels do not experience time as humans do. Pre-Fall time, Eschatological time, Scientific Deep Time (zillions of years).

Broader Themes:

- Humanity continues God's work of ordering and filling (subduing as gardening, not exploitation). Creation moves from chaos to order/justice/peace to life/abundance.
- Patristic modern literalism or scientific debates.
- **Temple**: 'Rest' for gods in the Ancient Near East is always done in a Temple. Prior to day 1, God's spirit was present over a non-functional cosmos/primordial sea. God creates his Garden Temple then takes up His residence/rule in the Temple of the Cosmos on Day 7.
- **Isaiah 66:1-2** "Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord."
- **Solomon's temple** took 7 years to build (1Kings 6:37-38). Most of the time was the material phase of quarrying stone, mining & processing precious metals, building furniture, etc. When this was all done did the Temple exist? No, if God was not in it. It is the inauguration ceremony that transforms lumber, stone, gold and cloth into a temple (Num 7:10-11, 84,88; 1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chron 7:5).
- The inauguration of Solomon's Temple included a 7 day dedication feast/banquet (1 Kings 8:65; 2 Chron 7:9).
- Solomon's dedication prayer outlines the **functions** of the temple (1 Kings 8:22-45).
- The *Barah* of Genesis is actually a "**temple text**" & should be understood as the functional origins of the cosmos as a temple, instead of material creation. It is describing the creation of the cosmic temple with all of its functions and with God dwelling in its midst.

- This is why Day 7 is so significant. Without God taking up residence in the temple, it does not exist. Hence the world is a place for God's presence. All of the functions of the created order are *anthropocentric* for meeting humanity's needs while the cosmic temple is *theocentric*, with God's presence serving as the defining element.
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