

# What were we put in the world to do?

Leaders Guide



*“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”*

*Genesis 1:31*

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## Creation

### Study 1 | Genesis 1:1 – 2:3

#### INTRODUCTION

It is far too easy to read the first chapters of Genesis with the questions of our time: “were the days of creation 24 hours long?” “how long ago did this happen?” “is this history or myth?” “how does this square with modern views of science and evolution?” Of course, these are important questions and we can probably learn some things from Genesis 1-11 that are relevant to them. But we don’t learn very much from a text if we ask it questions that it was not written to answer. Genesis is, frankly, about deeper issues than biological origins. It is answering questions like: “what *are* human beings? what are we here *for*? what is our relationship to the nature and the world? Essentially, Genesis 1 is not about the “*How*” of creation but rather about the “*Why*”. That is, ultimately, far more important.

**Note:** Though the discussion will certainly begin to touch on them, we will give more time in next week’s session to the discussion of 1) creation and evolution, and 2) the meaning of the “*image of God*”. Keep this in mind.

**1. vv.1-3. a) Was the earth ‘without form and void’ (v.2) before God began to create (v.1) or after? Why is this a significant question? [Look at Hebrews 11:3 for help with the answer.] b) What does v.2-3 tell us about the ‘means’ by which God always creates?**

a) The relationship between v.1 and v.2

There have been at least three ways to interpret the relationship of verses 1 and 2.

a) The least likely interpretation reads v.2 as a contrast to v.1. This view translates: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, but then the earth became formless and void and dark, and God had to go back and create it all over.” This is the so-called “Gap” theory which posits that the six days of (re-)creation occurred many years after an initial creation which was followed by some disaster. Some people try to place dinosaurs etc. in this “gap” between v.1 and v.2. But there is no grammatical basis for this view. There is no “But” to begin v.2 nor is there any reason to translate the verb “was” as “became”. This is an example of how we can try to force a text to answer questions it is not addressing. I mention it because this view has surprising circulation.

b) A more likely interpretation reads v.2 as a parenthetical statement to a clause completed in v.3. This view translates: “When God began to create, (the earth being without form and void), God said...” This is not impossible grammatically,

but it is not the most natural way of reading, and we have to ask the question — if God did not create the original “stuff” of the earth, where did it come from? Hebrews 11:3 and many other passages tell us that there was no universe at all before God spoke. See also John 1:3, Col.1:16, Rom.11:36. If the earth were “already there” then God did not create absolutely everything, and that would compromise the absoluteness of his power and authority. c) The most likely interpretation is that v.2 is the result of v.1. This view translates: “God created the heavens and the earth. But after the initial creative act, the earth was still shapeless and empty. Then God proceeded to say...”

b) What are the means for creation?

The two instruments for creation is the “*Spirit of God*” and the Word of God (“*and God said*”). It is fascinating to see how the Spirit and the Word always work together throughout the Bible. Christians are said to be born again by the Spirit (Jn.3:3) but also to be born again by the Word (1 Peter 1:23). We are told to be “filled with the Spirit” (Eph.5:18ff) but we are also called to be filled with the Word (Col.3:16ff) — and in each case the effects are basically the same. In creation of the world, and in the re-creation of salvation, the Spirit and the Word are inseparable, bringing life where there is no life. If our faith is only Word-oriented, it will be rational, cold, dogmatic; if our faith is only Spirit-oriented, it will be too emotional, intuitive, shapeless, unaccountable. God never brings life and growth without both the Word and the Spirit.

**2. A quick reading of Genesis 1 reveals a highly repetitive, patterned text.**

**a) What are the main repetitions — words, phrases, ideas? b) What broader repetitive pattern do you see between the first six days? i.e. how are days 4-6 a recap of 1-3?**

a) The main repetitions

The main repetition is the word “*God*” with the word “*made*” or “*created*”. “*God*” appears 35 times in the first 34 verses. He overwhelms the text, he dominates and overshadows everything. Nothing happens unless he makes it happen. Nothing is made or created except by him. As we saw immediately above, the extreme repetition is a way of saying, “*without him was not anything made that was made*” (Jn 1:3).

The second main repetitive pattern is the phrase “*And God said*”. This occurs once on the first (v.3), second (v.5), fourth (v.14) and fifth (v.20) days of creation. But it occurs twice on the third day and several times on the sixth day. This shows the importance of the Word of God in creation.

A third main repetitive pattern is the idea of the power of God’s Word. Repeatedly we are told, “*and there was*” or “*and it was so*” (v.3, 9, 11, 14, 24, 30). We do not see God saying, “I’m going to do this” and then going to do it. Almost always, he says: “Let there (or it) be...” and immediately “it was so”.

Our words only express the intention to act, but God's word *is* an action itself.

A fourth main repetition is the "benediction" phrase — "*and God saw that... was good*". God's assessment of the goodness of creation occurs in v.4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31. In verse 31, we have a kind of 'master benediction', where God sees "*all that he had made... was very good*".

A fifth main repetitive idea is that of "separating" or making distinctions. On the first day, God separates the light from the darkness (v.4). On the second day he separates the sky from the sea (v.7). On the third day, though the word "separates" is not used, he separates the land from the water. Also, he separates out the various plants "*according to their kind*" (v.11-12). On the fourth day he separates the day from the night (v.14). On the fifth day, though the word "separates" is missing, God now separates out the various animals "*according to their kind*". The initial act of creation (v.1) is *ex nihilo* — out of nothing, but after that God's creative work consists of elaborating, distinguishing, and "drawing out" the creation into greater complexity.

#### b) The pattern of the days

A sixth main repetitive phrase and idea is the days of creation — "*the evening and the morning were... the day*" occurs six times. Obviously, the division of the creative work of God into six days is a repetition in itself, but there is also a broader pattern. The last three days return to each of the realms created in the first three days and give them their rightful inhabitants:

#### "Kingdoms"

- Day 1** Realms of Light and Dark
- Day 2** Realms of Sea and Sky
- Day 3** Realm of the Earth (Plants)

#### "Kings of the Kingdom"

- Day 4** Lights to "*govern*" (v.18) Light and Dark
- Day 5** Creatures to "*fill*" or dominate Sea and Sky
- Day 6** Creatures of the Earth; Humankind
- Day 7** God the Creator

### **3. Look at each of the repetitive patterns you have identified and answer: what is each repetition designed to teach us about 1) God, 2) the world and creation? (What are the 'lessons' we are to learn from each repetition?)**

1) God – The chapter shows us:

A *personal God*. The verbs of the chapter show us a God who cannot be in any way referred to as an "It". God speaks, plans, creates, sees, evaluates, enjoys. First "lesson": This means that ultimately he is not simply a "force" or an "all soul". He is *distinct* from the universe, rather than being the 'soul' of the



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3. a) What do we learn from the fact that God worked 6 days and then rested? (2:2) (Why did the author depict the creation of God as a typical 7 day-week?)  
b) What do we learn from the fact that God planted a garden (2:8)?
4. 2:8-25. a) List all the human needs that are fully provided for in the earthly paradise. b) What do we learn from the fact that God put us to work in a garden in paradise (2:15)?
5. Read Exodus 20:8-11. a) Make a list of some common views of work which are prevalent today but which differ from the Biblical view and attitude toward work. b) Which of these wrong views do you tend to fall into? What can you do about it?

6. 1:31-2:3. The phrase 'Sabbath observance' has a negative ring to us, but that is not the case here! a) What does the text imply about what God's 'rest' is? Read Exodus 23:10-11, Deut.7-11; Lev.25:8-17. b) How can we follow his example of Sabbath rest better in our own lives?

7. Read Hebrews 3:7-4:11 and Mark 2:23-3:6. a) What deeper and fuller kind of 'rest' do they speak of? b) How is Jesus the key to relating this deeper kind of rest to our weekly pattern of rest and work?