

# THE EARLY WORLD

## The First Creation Story

Genesis 1:1 – 2:4

### INTRODUCTION

Before we begin our reading of the *First Creation Story* (Genesis 1:1-2:4), there are few things that need to be explained to help us interpret the text correctly.

1. The text is traditionally believed to have been written by the Prophet Moses. Inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit, Moses may have taken an existing ancient account of creation and re-wrote it to reflect Israel's faith in the one true God, the sole Creator of the universe. It was composed in a way that it could be easily remembered and memorized, told, and re-told. The inspired text teaches us the spiritual truths that God wants us to know.
2. The main purpose of the story is not to answer the question *How did God create the universe?* (a question for science), but to answer the question *Why did God create the universe?* (a question for theology). However, as you study the text more deeply, you will be gently surprised to discover that the story not only answers the question *Why did God create?* but also gives answers to the question *How did God create?* To any reader, this should be proof enough that the text is truly inspired by God!
3. *The text of the story is not describing seven 24-hour days (one week), but seven distinct ages.* Note that the sun, the moon and the 24-hour day are not created until the fourth day or age (Genesis 1:16-17). God created the universe in six distinct ages of time, which may have been millions or billions of years in length.
4. *Each day (age) begins in darkness and ends in light.* Darkness represents chaos; and light represents the manifestation of something new – a new order and beauty. For Jews to this day, each 24-hour day begins in the evening at sunset, and ends in light the following day.
5. *The seventh day is altogether different.* Whereas all six days of creation begin in darkness and end in light, the seventh day begins in light and has no end. This is the eternal age in which God rests. All creation, brought to completion and perfection, now rests in Him for all eternity.
6. *The days (ages) are not set in chronological order.* The author has used the given order to emphasize the overall order and beauty of the cosmos, and not to provide a chronology of events. The word *cosmos* originates from the Greek word *kosmos*. It means "good order," "good arrangement," "beauty and harmony." For a chronological order that agrees with the discoveries of modern science, follow the pattern: Day 1 – Day 4; Day 2 – Day 5; Day 3 – Day 6; Day 7.

7. *We are still in the sixth day (age)*. The story tells us that God created man in His image and likeness on the six day (age). Since He has not yet finished creating man (human race), we are obviously still in the sixth day (age).
8. *The seventh day (age) is still yet to come in its fullness*. In the New Testament, it is referred to as *the Kingdom of God* and *the Age to Come*. At the end of each day, with the setting of the sun, there is a time of transition and overlap from one day to the next. The same applies to the transition from one age to another. And so, we are still in the sixth age, but the seventh age has already broken through with the Resurrection of Jesus. It come in its fullness when Jesus returns in glory, and the sixth age will come to an end.
9. The Hebrew word *bara* is a verb that means “create”, and always has God for its subject. It is used only three times in the Bible to indicate that God has created sometime completely totally new and unique that has never existed before. All three uses of the verb *bara* are found in Genesis, chapter 1: “In the beginning God *created (bara)* the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1); “God *created (bara)* the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves” (Genesis 1:21); and “God *created (bara)* man in His own image” (Genesis 1:27).
10. *The text uses archaic language, different from ours*. It is important to know and understand the meaning of key words and phrases. The following are some examples:
  - a. **heaven** – is a word that can mean three different things: 1) the sky or the earth’s atmosphere, known as the *first heaven*; 2) outer space or the universe, known as the *second heaven*; and 3) the invisible or spiritual world, known as the *third heaven*
  - b. **the heavens** – can be a reference to the earth’s atmosphere and outer space (the heavens of the visible world); or a reference to all three heavens (both the visible and invisible worlds)
  - c. **earth** (*Gen 1:1*)– refers to physical matter, soil, dust, dry land
  - d. **light** (*Gen 1:3, 16*)– is a reference to a fixed or moving star; **lights** (*Gen 1:14, 15*) is a reference to fixed stars and moving stars (planets, moons)
  - e. **the great light** (*Gen 1:16*) – is a reference to our sun
  - f. **the lesser light** (*Gen 1:16*) – refers to our moon
  - g. **firmament, vault, dome** (*Gen 1:6*) – is the roof above the earth, in the shape of a dome, which separated the first heaven (the earth’s atmosphere) from the second heaven (outer space)
  - h. **the waters above** (*Gen 1:7*) – is a reference to outer space; it was believed that water filled the second heaven
  - i. **the waters below** (*Gen 1:7*) – refers to the waters beneath the earth
  - j. **day** (*Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 29, 23, 31; 2:2*) – from the Hebrew word *yom* can refer to an age, a prolonged period of time, or a 24-hour day
  - k. **seven** – is a number that symbolizes fullness or completion

- I. **man** (*Gen 1:26, 27*)– from the Hebrew word *adam*’ and the Greek word *anthropos*, this word has a double meaning: it can refer to the whole human race collectively (male and female); or to the individual person (male or female).
11. *All that God has created is good.* At the end of each day, God looks at His creation and proclaims that it is “good” (*Gen 1:3, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25*). At the end of the sixth day he reflects upon all that He created and proclaims that it is “very good” (*Gen 1:31*).
12. *God is the sole Creator of all things, who pre-exists and transcends all His creation.* He alone, has no beginning and no end. All creation reveals God Divine plan, His will, design, purpose, and final goal. God sustains and governs all things, and He is leading all history towards its final fulfillment.

### ***The Hebrew Concept of the World***

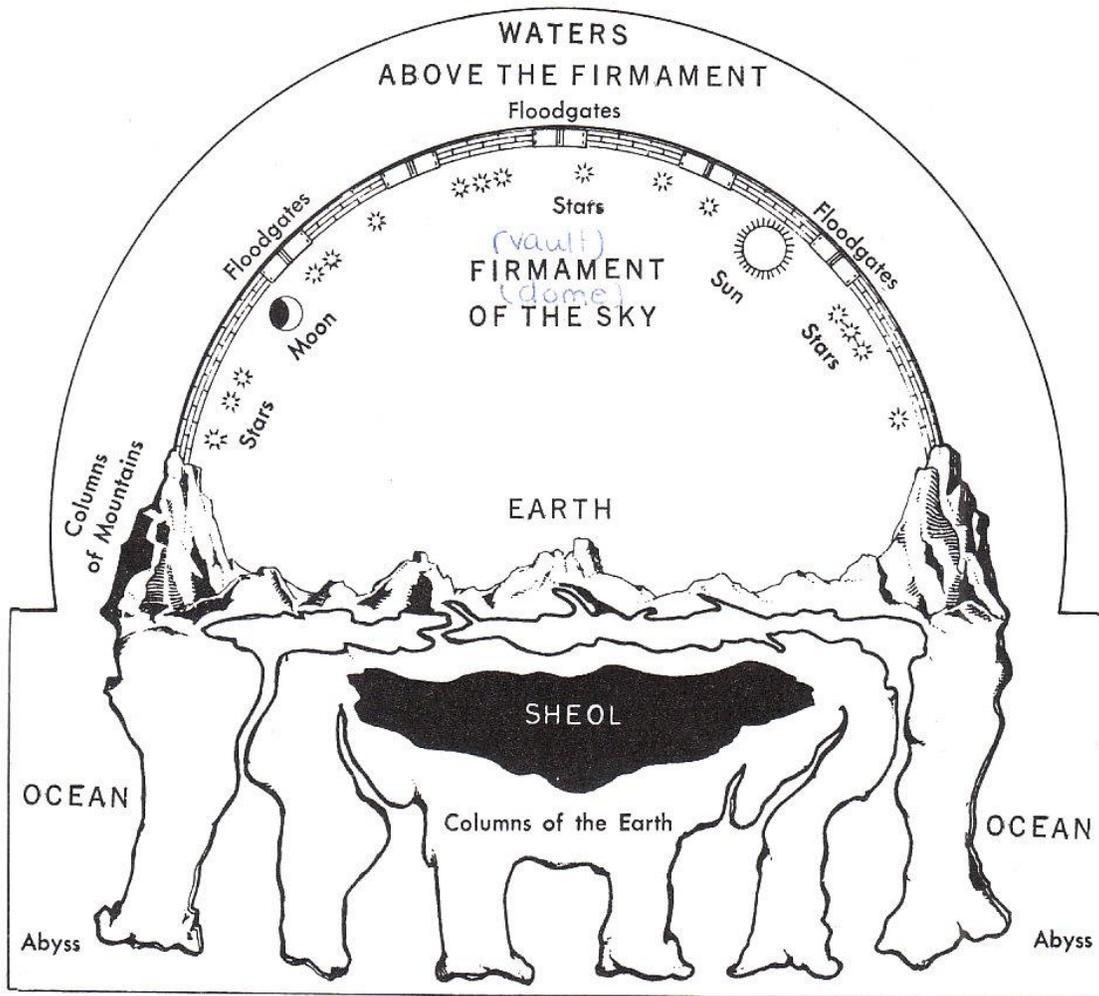
According to the Hebrew understanding of the universe (similar to pagan neighbors), the earth was a flat platform set firmly on solid columns or pillars. *Sheol* in Hebrew (*Hades* in Greek) was the netherworld, the land of the dead, a region of darkness somewhere below the earth’s surface. At first, the waters covered the earth. Overtime, they receded. Dry land appeared and the seas, rivers and oceans of the earth were formed.

In the beginning, water covered the earth and filled everything above and below. When the dome (vault or firmament) was created, it separated the waters above from the waters below, and created a space for the earth’s atmosphere (air). This dome resembled an overturned bowl upon the earth. The space within this dome is called *the first heaven*. This *sky-dome* contains many openings or floodgates. From time to time, these floodgates are opened, allowing the upper waters to fall upon the earth in the form of rain. The sun, moon, and stars visible in the sky are objects that move along the ceiling of the dome.

The place of the *upper waters* corresponds to our concept of outer space. In Scripture, this place is also known as the *second heaven*. It was believed that the second heaven was filled with water, hence the reference *upper waters*.

Far above, beyond the upper waters of the second heaven, was the domain of God and all His heavenly hosts. This was called the “Third Heaven,” God’s home and the place of His Heavenly Throne.

Heavenly Seat of the Divinity



## STUDY AND REFLECTION

### Preliminary Issues

*How was the Hebrew concept of the world different from their pagan neighbours?*

In their worldview, as described in the first creation story, the Hebrews made it very clear that in the beginning there was only one God, who pre-existed all creation. This one God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). The account also makes it clear that the sun is not a god to be worshipped. It was created in time, along with the moon and the stars, to allow for the calculation of seasons and time.

*What is the purpose of the first creation story?*

The purpose of the first creation story is to provide spiritual truths about God and His Creation, not scientific facts. The text is concerned about questions such as: Why did God create? Why do we exist? What is our purpose here on earth? Why was man created last? Why is creation so ordered, harmonious and beautiful? And so, the story describes for us the natural beauty, goodness of order of God's creation in a poetic story form. The account is clearly a story that would be read aloud, memorized, told, and re-told, especially to people who could not read. Historical chronology is secondary; priority is given to poetry and style.

*Do you think that the First Creation Story can be helpful in any way to science and the scientific study of Creation?*

YES! Even though it is not a scientific text, the first creation story can be helpful to science and the study of the universe. The text is objective, and it does have something to say about how the universe was created.

The first creation story tells us that in the beginning, the world was covered with water. Then, the atmosphere was created. The first forms of life began in water. The development of living creatures moved from water, to air, and then finally to land. All of this agrees with what scientific study proposes to be true.

In the end, there is only one truth. Whatever truth is revealed by scientific study will be in perfect agreement with the truths presented to us by biblical creation story.

### ***The Creation of the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1-2)***

*In the very first verse of Genesis we read, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Living in the context of polytheism (belief in many gods), why is this statement so important to the Hebrews? What are the implications of these words?*

First, Genesis 1:1-2 makes it clear that in the beginning – there was only God. Nothing else existed, only God.

Second, the text indicates that God created the heavens and the earth *out of nothing*. Everything created came into being out of nothing and has a beginning in time. God alone is the beginning and origin of all things, the *Principal Cause*,

uncaused, without a beginning. **All that exists outside of God, was in its whole substance, produced out of nothing by God.**

Third, God was moved by His Goodness to create the world. He created freely, without any exterior compulsion or interior necessity.

Fourth, God not only created the heavens and the earth by His infinite power, He also sustains it, cares for it, directs and guides it to the fulfillment of His Divine plan.

*In Gen 1:1, it says that God created the “heavens” (plural), not “heaven”. What does the word “heavens” refer to? Does it refer to the invisible world, the visible world, or both?*

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew Bible uses the plural, “heavens,” and the Greek Bible (Septuagint) uses the singular, “heaven.” The word “heavens” in this verse is most likely referring to the invisible world (the third heaven) and to visible world (the second heaven). **In the beginning, God created both the visible material world and invisible spiritual world simultaneously, both at the same time.**

*In Gen 1:2 it says that “the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters”. What could this mean? What is the author trying to say?*

The Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) was moving over the face of the waters (in the Greek, “through the waters”), because something mysterious and wonderful was about to happen! There is a heightened sense of expectation. Out of darkness and disorder, God will bring about order, beauty and light.

This image of the Spirit of God hovering is found in the Divine Liturgy. The priest waves the *aer* gently over the presented gifts of bread and wine as a sign that the Spirit of God is hovering over them and over the community present, moving them to confess their faith. Something mysterious and wonderful is about to happen! The transformation of the gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is about to take place.

During the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the heavens are opened and the Spirit is seen in the form of a dove, hovering over Christ and the waters. It’s a visible sign that God the Father is about to do something new, mysterious and wonderful. The re-creation of the universe is about to begin, through His Son, Jesus Christ!

*In Gen 1:1-3, can you identify a subtle reference to the one God in three Persons?*

There is an indirect reference to the Most Holy Trinity in the very first three verses of Sacred Scripture. In Genesis 1:1, “God” who creates the “heavens and the earth” is God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity. In Gen 1:2, the “Spirit of God” Who hovers over the waters is the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity; and in Gen 1:3ff, “God said” is the Word of God, the second Person of the Trinity. All things come into being through Him.

***The Six Days of Creation (Genesis 1:3 to 2:1)***

*According to the first creation story, when does a typical day begin and when does it end?*

If you look at Genesis 1:5, you will notice that the first day begins with evening (darkness) and ends with morning (light). Each new day begins in darkness and ends with light.

The Church still follows this Hebrew understanding. Liturgically, each day begins in the evening at sundown with the celebration of Vespers; and ends the next day with the setting of the sun. Vespers always begins with the singing of Psalm 103(104), a psalm of worship which extols God's boundless care for His creation.

Sunday, the Lord's Day, really begins on Saturday evening with the celebration of Great Vespers; and the high-point of each Sunday is the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning. The day moves from darkness to light.

*In your opinion, what is the real meaning of the word "DAY"? Does it refer to a 24-hour period of time, or does it refer to a "whole age" of time?*

The biblical "days" of creation are most likely not solar days, as we know them – lasting 24 hours. Note that the sun, the moon, and the stars do not appear until the fourth day of creation. The original Hebrew word is *yom*. Although translated as "day", it can also mean "age" or a designated period of time. The following historians and fathers of the Church have also agreed that we are not dealing with 24-hour days, but entire ages of time: Philo (c. 20 BC- AD 50); Josephus (AD 37-107); Justin Martyr (AD 100-166); Irenaeus (AD 130-200); Hippolytus (AD 170-236); Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-220); Origen (AD 185-254); Augustine (AD 354-430); Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (AD 260-340). Therefore, the Biblical account does not contradict scientific theories that calculate the formation of the earth in billions of years.

What we are dealing with here are *divine days*, not *human days*. That is why the apostle Peter writes: "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). Now God does not live in our time, nor is He bound by our time. He created "time" when He created space and the expanding universe. God exists "before all ages", beyond all time and space.

It is interesting to note here that the Greek language has two different words to describe time. First there is *kairos*, which is God's time, describing the everlasting eternity of God and His kingdom; and then there is *chronos* or chronological time as we know it, which came into being when God created the universe.

*How many times is the phrase "And God said" repeated in Genesis 1? Highlight or underline them in your bible. What point is being made here?*

The phrase "and God said" is repeated nine times in total. God the Father creates everything through His spoken Word, the Son. The Word of God is a Person, and all

creation comes into being through Him. In the Creed we profess, “I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, on in being with the Father. **Through Him all things were made.**” God creates effortlessly. God speaks, and things come into existence.

*In verse Gen 1:6, what is being created by God? Depending on your bible translation, what is “the firmament” or “the vault”?*

The firmament is the dome over the earth, which protects the earth’s atmosphere and is filled with air. Some translations use the word “vault” and others use “dome.”

*On the fourth day, God created “lights in the firmament” (see verse 14). What are these lights (the two great lights, v.16) and what is their purpose?*

The lights in the firmament are the stars in the sky. Fixed stars are suns; moving stars are planets. The two great light that rule the day and night are the sun and the earth’s moon. The stars allow man to measure time, days, years and festivals.

### ***The Creation of Mankind (Gen 1:24-31)***

*On what day were the animals of the earth created? On what day were human beings created? Which day of our week symbolically corresponds to this day?*

The animals were created in the first part of the sixth day (age). The human race was also created on the sixth day (age). Note that the redemption and re-creation of mankind occurs on the sixth day. Jesus dies on the cross on a Friday. In reality, God is not finished creating the human race. One could say that we are still in the sixth day (age). The seventh and final age will break through with the Resurrection of Christ.

*In verse 26, it says that God created man in His image and likeness? Why both “image” and “likeness”? What is the difference? What is the point being made here?*

By nature, man is an **image of God**. All the characteristics of God are reflected in him in a created and limited way. For example, if God is all-knowing, then man is capable of knowing; if God is eternal, man is created in time to live forever; if God is Spirit, then man has been created to be a composition of spirit and matter; if God has unlimited free will, then man has been created with a limited will.

An image of Queen Elizabeth on a coin is not Queen Elizabeth; it is a recognizable image because the features, the characteristics are the same. So too, man is a created image of God. He is not God, but only a reflection, a recognizable image of the Creator.

**Likeness** refers to the fact that man is called to continually grow and become forever more and more “like God.” This requires grace, and man’s cooperation with God. In other words, humans have to work with God to become more and more like Him. They cannot accomplish this on their own.

Since God is infinite, man can never become perfectly “like God.” He can only continually grow in God’s likeness without ever becoming “like God” in a complete sense.

*Does “image and likeness” refer to each human being, or to the whole human race, or to both?*

The image and likeness of God is found in each individual human being, male and female; in a fuller extent, in the marriage of a man and a woman, as one body; and in fullness, in the whole human race as one body (created male and female).

*What is the original purpose of mankind? What did God want mankind to do?*

Man’s vocation is to be a steward of God’s creation; to have dominion over the earth, to look after it without abusing it, to take care of it and to offer it back to God. In Genesis 1:28, God gives mankind the commandment to be fruitful, to multiply and to fill the earth.

*Originally, were human beings intended to be meat-eaters? What did God assign to them to eat?*

No, human beings were not originally intended to be meat-eaters. In Genesis 1:29, God gives man all the seed-bearing plants and trees as food.

*How many times is the phrase, “**God saw that it was good**”, repeated? Highlight or underline them. Why does this phrase repeat so often? What point is being made here? What does God do and say at the very end of the sixth day?*

The phrase is repeated six times in total. At the seventh time, God looks back at everything and says that it is “very good.” God Himself is goodness itself, and only He determines what is good and what is lacking.

*In the creation of mankind, can you find another subtle reference to the Most Holy Trinity?*

There is a second indirect reference to the Holy Trinity in verse 27, when God says, “Let **us** make man in our own image...”

*The Hebrew verb ‘bara’ is unique. It is only used three times in the entire Bible: Gen 1:1, Gen 1:21, Gen 1:27 and Gen 27. Re-read these three verses and locate the word that is common to all three verses. How is ‘bara’ translated into English? What is so unique and specific about this word ‘bara’ and why is it only used in these three places?*

The word *bara’* means created. The subject of this verb is always God. It is only used when God creates something totally new, unique and wonderful. It marks a new and special beginning. Thus, we see that there are three things that are radically new and unique when they are created: 1) the heavens and the earth; 2) the living creatures in the waters and the air; and 3) the first human pair.

***The Seventh "DAY" (Gen 2:1-4)***

*To what day of our week does the "seventh day" correspond to? What does God do on this day? Has the "Seventh Day" happened, is it happening repeatedly, or is it still to happen sometime in the future?*

Saturday (the Sabbath) is the seventh day of our week. God rests from all creative work in the seventh day or age. If God is still in the process of creating mankind (the whole human race as He has planned it in His infinite Wisdom), then we must still be in the sixth day, or the sixth age. And so, the sixth age has not yet fully come to an end. Therefore, the seventh day is the age that is still to come. It is the day when everything is finished and brought to perfection. The Second Coming of Christ in glory and the Final Judgment marks the end of the sixth age and the fullness of the seventh age, the kingdom of God, which will reign forever. That is the day (the age) when we shall full enter into God's rest.

By observing the Lord's Day every week and worshipping God, we acknowledge that we are God's children, members of His Family, heirs and citizens of His eternal kingdom. By making the Lord's day holy, we express our desire is to enter into God's eternal peace and rest of the age to come, and the unceasing worship of God alone.

*Just out of interest, if you were asked to describe the building of your house, how would you do it? When would you move in? Is there any similarity to the first Story of Creation?*

I would probably begin by describing the compartments, or the important sections. First, I would describe the digging of the basement and the establishment of a foundation, next the building of walls and rooms, and finally the completion of the roof. Then, I would go back and describe the completion of each room (or section), the finishing and all the furnishings that are put into the house.

The first creation story follows a similar pattern. First, the author describes the beauty and order of compartments, or basis sections: Light and Darkness, the Waters, and the Atmosphere, and finally the appearance of Land and vegetation to cover it. Then, what follows is a description of the furnishings: The sun, moon and stars fit into the Light and Darkness; the sea creatures and flying birds fit into the Waters and the Atmosphere; and finally, the animals and man are placed upon the earth. There is a link between Day 1 and Day 4, Day 2 and Day 5, Day 3 and Day 6.

1. *Why was the world created?*

The Universe and all things in it were created for the glory of God! All things are called to give glory to God!