



GENESIS 1–3

BIBLE STUDY LESSONS

LES BRIDGEMAN

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Second Edition, Rev.

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Genesis 1–3: Bible Study Lessons, PDF

BibleBridge: Bible Study Lessons
Academic Bible Studies with a Devotional Emphasis for ages 14 and up

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Cover design by Sam Pitts

In the beginning
God created
the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible is the world's best-selling book and its ideas have influenced millions of people throughout the centuries. Therefore, the Bible deserves our attention, both mentally and emotionally.

But understanding the Bible requires effort and assistance. The books of the Bible were written in ancient Hebrew and Greek 2,000–3,000 years ago. If effort and help is needed to understand Charles Dickens who wrote in English 100 years ago, how much more so with the Bible? This guide has been written to help readers understand the Bible and engage with its contents on an intellectual and emotional level.

These lessons are for you if you are looking for the following:

- an intellectual *and* devotional study of Genesis 1–3,
- interpretation challenges addressed honestly and kept in perspective,
- interaction with other parts of Scripture (Old and New Testament),
- exposure to different views, including theistic evolution, without indoctrination on the one right view, and
- personal questions to engage the heart.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Genesis 1–3: Bible Study Lessons is an intellectual and devotional study of the first three chapters of Genesis for ages 15 and up. This course includes 23 lessons, 3 quizzes, 1 test, and an answer key.

Lessons usually include a brief review of a concept or fact found in the previous lesson, questions to be answered, and comments on specific verses. **Bold superscript numbers** in the lessons, quizzes, and test indicate answers in the Answer section. Please be sure to read the Answer section because it contains important information. The **footnotes** (indicated in the lessons with roman numerals) mostly contain bibliographic information.

This course incorporates many different Bible versions, but the primary translation used is the New International Version. The NIV text of Genesis 1–3 is included in the lessons, but other Scripture verses will be examined so it's best to have your Bible open as you go through each lesson. This course also incorporates free online resources. Since the internet is always in a state of flux, the instructions regarding online resources may need to be updated.

This is a self-study course so the pace of completing the lessons is up to you. There are 23 lessons and 1 test so if you do 5 lessons each week, this course will be completed in about 5 weeks. If you do 3 lessons each week, this course will be completed in 8 weeks.

How you take the quizzes and test is also up to you (e.g., open notes, closed notes, or a combination). Space is provided in the lessons, quizzes, and test for answering the questions, but if you need more space please use a personal notebook along with this study guide.

ABBREVIATIONS

General

= precedes a definition

v(v) – verse(s)

OT – Old Testament

NT – New Testament

CEB – Common English Bible

ESV – English Standard Version

GW – God’s Word Translation

HCSB – Holman Christian Study Bible

ISV – International Standard Version

NASB – New American Standard Bible

NET – New English Translation

NIV – New International Version

NIRV – New International Reader’s Version

NLT – New Living Translation

NRSV – New Revised Standard Version

Old Testament Books

Gen – Genesis

Exod – Exodus

Deut – Deuteronomy

Ezr – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Ps – Psalms

Prov – Proverbs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Ezek – Ezekiel

Hos – Hosea

New Testament Books

Matt – Matthew

Lk – Luke

Rom – Romans

1 Cor – 1 Corinthians

2 Cor – 2 Corinthians

Phil – Philippians

Heb – Hebrews

Rev – Revelation

Lesson 1: Learning to Observe

Welcome to our study of Genesis 1–3, the first three chapters of the Bible! I think you'll find these chapters fascinating, meaningful, and challenging.

1. Before we begin our study, however, we must learn how to study. While there are several ways to study the Bible, we'll use this lesson to focus on the inductive study method. An **inductive study** starts by observing details and then uses those details to arrive at general principles. For example, let's say you spent one hour watching a bird with three baby birds in a nest. During that time, you watched as the bird flew away and returned with food for the babies. You also noticed that when a predator approached the nest, the bird flapped its wings and chirped noisily. What would you conclude from your observations?¹

2. Your study of the bird was inductive because you started by noticing details and then arrived at a general principle. A **deductive study**, on the other hand, reverses the order by beginning with a general principle and proceeding to the details. Using our example, a deductive study would begin with the assertion that the mother bird cares for her babies and then it would seek observations to support that assertion. So a deductive study starts at the top (general principle) then moves to the bottom (details supporting that principle), while an inductive study starts at the bottom (details) then moves to the top (principle). Essentially, a deductive study assumes the conclusion. When we assume something about someone we are using deductive reasoning. What assumptions have you made about someone you know that were proven to be wrong?

3. Here are the three steps to an inductive Bible study:
 - I. **Observe** – List all of the details you notice in the text such as repetition, keywords, how it begins, how it ends, etc. The question you’re trying to answer is, “What do I see?”
 - II. **Interpret** – Explain what your observations mean. If you have questions about the text you can list them here also. The question you’re trying to answer is, “What do my observations mean?”
 - III. **Apply** – Offer practical suggestions for incorporating the meaning of the text into your life. The question you’re trying to answer is, “What difference does it make?” or “How can I use this in my life?”
4. The first step is often the hardest to do well. Why is observing difficult?²
5. If you’re inclined to notice details you may find it easy to make observations. For others, making observations is difficult because it requires patience and curiosity. Why is observing important?³
6. Write out Genesis 1:1 then list at least five observations on it. (We’ll focus on this verse in the next lesson.)

Lesson 2: In the Beginning (Gen 1:1)

Review: What are the three steps of an inductive Bible study?

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen 1:1)

1. The first verse of Genesis is explosive. The name of the book comes from the opening words, “In the beginning.” **Genesis** = beginning. Certain religious and philosophical teachings claim that the universe is eternal, but Genesis asserts that our universe had a beginning. The Big Bang theory, currently the dominant model in cosmology, also affirms that the universe had a beginning. Because everything in the universe is moving farther apart, the Big Bang theory asserts that everything was originally condensed at a point and then it exploded causing the outward movement. **Cosmology** = the study of the origin and development of the universe.ⁱ While the age of the universe is a highly contentious issue, Genesis doesn’t begin with an explicit date of the universe’s origin, but rather with the generic, “In the beginning.” (We’ll consider the age of the universe in a later lesson.). What is your view of the universe? Does it have a beginning or not? Why?

2. What difference would it make to you if the opposite of your view of the universe was true?

ⁱ If you’re interested in engaging interviews with leading scientists and philosophers, both Christian and non-Christian, on the nature of the universe see the Cosmos section of closetotruth.com.

3. The Genesis creation story is unique in the modern world because it doesn't give logical arguments for God's existence; it simply asserts God's existence from its first sentence. And then it goes on to state that the one God who exists, made everything. Logical arguments include the ***Kalam cosmological argument***, which asserts the following. 1.) Whatever begins to exist has a cause, 2.) the universe began to exist, 3.) therefore the universe has a cause. And of course, that cause must be outside of time and space, and therefore eternal and powerful. Another logical proof is called the ***teleological argument***, which states that since the universe appears to be designed, there must be a Designer. What do you think about arguments for God's existence? Which of the two arguments above do you find most persuasive? Why?
4. The Genesis creation story was unique in the ancient world because it didn't explain God's origin. Ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian creation stories narrate the origin of the gods. **Theogony** = the birth story of the gods. Moses, who has traditionally been understood to be the author of Genesis, wrote "from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps 90:2). In other words, God always existed.ⁱⁱ What do you think about the idea that God always existed?
5. The Hebrew word used for God in Genesis 1 is *elohim*. **Elohim** = God. The Hebrew verb used in Genesis 1:1 is *bara*. **Bara** = create. In the Bible, *bara* is usually focused on the creation of something new by God.ⁱⁱⁱ In that sense, can humans *create* anything?⁴

ⁱⁱ Bill T Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 49.

ⁱⁱⁱ Richard E. Averbeck, *Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2013), ch. 1.

6. The phrase “**the heavens and the earth**” = everything. That is the traditional interpretation of “the heavens and the earth.” A minority interpretation views the phrase more concretely and literally as a reference to “the sky and the land.” Technically, the Hebrew words **shamayim** and **erets** can be translated as sky and land respectively, but when placed together they are usually understood as a merism for the totality of all that exists. **Merism** = an expression of totality that uses contrasting parts. What other merisms can you think of? If you can’t think of any, look them up online and record them below.

7. Everything includes:

- all matter—even atomic and subatomic,
- the physical laws that govern all matter, and
- space and time.

Since God made everything, nothing existed before God created it. So before creation, God and only God existed. That rules out **dualism** = the eternal existence of two entities, such as light and darkness or good and evil. And that also excludes the existence of other gods. Genesis 1:1 introduces the key biblical theme of **monotheism** = the belief in only one God. And monotheism is a rejection of **polytheism** = the belief in many gods; **pantheism** = the belief that everything is god; **atheism** = the belief that God does not exist; and **agnosticism** = the belief that we cannot know if God exists. Finally, if only God existed before creation then God must have ultimately created out of nothing. **Creatio ex nihilo** = creation out of nothing. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” can keep us thinking for a lifetime.

8. Review the vocabulary words in this lesson then write out Hebrews 11:3.

Lesson 3: Repetition in Genesis 1

Review: Define bara, Elohim, and creatio ex nihilo.

1. A major part of making good literary observations is noticing what the author is emphasizing. How do you emphasize something in your writing?
2. How do you emphasize something when you are sending a text message?
3. How would you emphasize something without using bold print, italics, underlines, exclamation points and all caps?
4. The biblical authors were limited in how they could emphasize words because they didn't have access to the devices we use today like **bold**, *italics*, CAPITAL LETTERS, etc. One of the primary ways biblical authors emphasized words was by repeating them. That means that when we read the Bible we have to pay special attention to repeated words and phrases. Read Genesis 1 on the next page then highlight the repeated words and phrases.⁵ One of the best ways to mark repetition is by highlighting the same word or phrase in the same way each time it appears. (For example, you could use a yellow highlighter for the word *light* each time it appears and a blue highlighter for the word *water* each time it appears. If you don't use different colors, use different symbols or shapes. Just be consistent by using the same color or symbol each time that word or phrase appears.)^{iv}

^{iv} To work with Bible passages in a particular translation go to biblegateway.com, select the passage and translation, then copy and paste the passage onto a blank document, then print.

Genesis 1

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

³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he 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—the first day.

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

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

¹¹ Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. ¹² The 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. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

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

²⁰ And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” ²¹ So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God 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.”²³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the 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 mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
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 in the sea and the birds in the sky 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 in the sky and all the creatures that move along 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. (NIV)

Footnotes:

- a. Genesis 1:26 Probable reading of the original Hebrew text (see Syriac); Masoretic Text *the earth*

Lesson 4: The Six Days

Review: List five repeated words or phrases in Genesis 1.

1. In this lesson, we'll focus on the six days of Genesis 1. While not everything fits neatly into the categories below, many scholars believe the six days can be divided into two main sections.^v Place an appropriate heading in the empty boxes for each column. What is the main activity happening in each column?⁶

Day 1 – Light	Day 4 – Sun, Moon, Stars
Day 2 – Sky	Day 5 – Fish & Fowl
Day 3 – Land and Seas & Vegetation	Day 6 – Animals & Human Beings

2. By categorizing the six days in this way, day one corresponds with day four, day two corresponds with day five, and day three corresponds with day six. In the first three days, God prepares the place and in the last three days, God fills it with occupants. In this way, God solves the fundamental problem of verse 2: “Now the earth was _____ and _____.” God forms then fills.
3. Read Genesis 1 again then list the repeated phrases used to describe each day of creation.⁷

^v For further study see Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), 39–59.

4. What is the significance of God declaring everything good?⁸

5. How to properly interpret the days of Genesis 1 has been the subject of much controversy. Here are four major ways of interpreting the days of Genesis 1 with support for each view.

Views on the “Days” of Genesis 1

- I. **24-hour days** – the days were literal 24-hour days and the events of creation occurred in the order in which they are stated in Genesis 1.

Support: The Hebrew word for day (*yom*) usually means a 24-hour period of time and the references to “evening and morning” at the end of each day make it clear that the author is thinking of typical 24-hour days. In addition, the statements in Exodus 20:8–11 and 31:17 support this view. Two variations of this view include: 1.) The days are literal 24-hour days with huge amounts of time between each day, called the “intermittent day” view. 2.) The days are 24 hours as we understand time today, but since time is relative, 24 hours today would mean billions of years at the start of creation.

6. Write out Exodus 20:11.

Problem: Many readers have struggled with chronological problems of the 24-hour-calendar day view. For example, how could there have been light on day one before the sun was made on day four? And without the sun, how could there have been “evening and morning” on the first three days? Finally, how could the plants (day three) have survived without the sun (day four)? Origen (AD 182–254) and Augustine (AD 354–430) asked these questions long ago. In his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Augustine entertained the idea that, contrary to the

way it sounds in Genesis 1, God actually created everything instantaneously. He suggested that Genesis 1 was written in the way it was so that readers could grasp the totality of all that God created.

Possible Solutions: First, some solve this problem by suggesting that the light of day one was a non-solar, divine light. Second, others suggest that the sun was in existence prior to day four, but its light finally penetrated Earth's atmosphere on day four. Third, because of the chronological challenge and other data some prefer to abandon the 24-hour day view for one of the views below.

- II. **Age-Day** – each of the six days were ages or long periods of time. Most who hold this view affirm the sequence of events as stated in Genesis 1 (see reasons.org), but others don't (see oldearth.org/progressive.htm).

Support: In the Bible, the Hebrew word for day is sometimes used for longer periods of time (cf. Gen 2:4, 17; Is 34:8). And echoing the words of Moses in Psalm 90, Peter says, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Pet 3:8).

7. Write out Psalm 90:4.

- III. **Analogical** – the days of Genesis 1 are real days, but they are not days as we understand them. They are God's days used as an analogy with our days. As with all analogies there are similarities and differences between the two items being compared.

Support: On the one hand, the evening and morning that concludes each of the six days directly corresponds with what we think of as a normal day. On the other hand, the first three days could not have been normal 24-hour days without the sun, which wasn't created until day four.

- IV. **Literary Framework** – the days of Genesis 1 did not actually occur; they are metaphorical. Specifically, the days are a creative literary device used to structure the account of creation.

Support: First, Genesis 1 is written symmetrically and includes rhyme, so we should interpret it as a creative piece of writing. Second, divine creation is mentioned in many other places in Scripture, without referring to the days. The point of the metaphor is to help us understand that God made everything and to encourage us to follow God's example of work and rest.

8. Which of the four views makes the most sense to you? Why?

9. Do you think that different views of the days of Genesis 1 make a big difference to a person's faith? Why or why not?⁹

Lesson 5: Light, Earthquakes, and Dinosaurs? (Gen 1:2–21)

Review: List the names of the four different views of the days in Genesis 1.

Now the earth was formless and empty,
darkness was over the surface of the deep,
and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (Gen 1:2)

1. The Hebrew text of Genesis 1 uses rhyming as a literary device. In Genesis 1:2, the Hebrews words for formless and empty are **tohu** = formless and **bohu** = empty. Do you think translators should try to preserve the rhyming when translating into English? Can you think of a way to preserve the rhyming in this case?
2. Where did the water-covered Earth of verse 2 come from? It simply appears without explanation. While many view Genesis 1:1 as a summary statement or title for the entire chapter, some view Genesis 1:1 as a prior event to the events that occur in the rest of the chapter. If Genesis 1:1—“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” is a prior event then the origin of the water-covered Earth can be found in verse 1.^{vi} If not, the story of creation simply skips straight to a water-covered Earth without explanation.^{vii} How do you view the relationship of Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 1:2?
3. How long was the watery Earth of verse 2 in existence? We don’t know. So when it comes to the age of Earth, we may have an indefinite period of time in Genesis 1.

^{vi} For support see my blog post *In the Beginning: Genesis 1:1* at www.bible-bridge.com/in-the-beginning-genesis-1.

^{vii} A strong argument in favor of viewing verse 1 as a summary statement and not a prior event to the rest of the chapter is that verse 1 is subordinate to verse 2 in Hebrew. Some translations make that relationship more obvious: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void . . .” (NRSV). “When God began to create the heavens and the earth—the earth was without shape or form . . .” (CEB). While it may seem odd to begin with watery chaos, other ancient creation stories began in the same way, such as the *Enuma Elish*.

4. The word for Spirit = *ruach*. Ruach can also be translated as wind or breath. “The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” What does that indicate about the Spirit?¹⁰

God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.”
And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. (Gen 1:5)

5. In Hebrew, the word used for the number of day one is unique among the seven days. It is “one” so technically this is “day one” not “the first day.” The words used for the other days indicate order in a series: second, third, fourth, etc. Most English Bible versions, however, use the word “first” instead of “one” in their translation, and therefore, most readers can’t see the difference. Here are two possible implications of this difference.

First, ancient commentators believed “the words ‘one day’ served to elevate the day of Creation to something more than part of a sequence . . . it is what we call a principle, an *arche*. On ‘day one,’ then, God creates light, which He thereby separates from darkness. It is out of this light, which is the product of God’s first creating word, that all the rest of Creation comes.”^{viii}

Second, it may indicate a forward-looking perspective. Since the second day had not transpired, the first day could not be called, “the first day.” There was no “second day” with which to compare it so it had to be called “day one.” Gerald Schroeder, an orthodox Jew and physicist, believes this distinction shows that we have a different perspective of time than the one presented in Genesis 1. While we are looking backward, Genesis 1 is looking forward from the time of creation. That may not seem significant, but Schroeder uses that observation to support his theory that the days of Genesis 1 were six literal 24-hour days and yet from another perspective they also encompassed millions of years. Time at the beginning of the universe, when the universe was much smaller, would have been experienced differently than we experience time today. Twenty-

^{viii} Patrick Henry Reardon, *Creation and the Patriarchal Histories: Orthodox Christian Reflections on the Book of Genesis* (Ben Lomond: Conciliar Press, 2008), 33.

four hours back then would be the equivalent of millions of years in the way that we experience time.^{ix}

6. In the New Testament, Paul uses God's command to give light in a spiritual and personal way. Write out 2 Corinthians 4:6.

7. Like verse 2, verse 9 indicates that water covered the earth. While earthquakes and tsunamis create incredible devastation, they are the result of plate tectonics. And without plate tectonics, water would continue to cover our planet.^x

Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds. And it was so. (Gen 1:11)

8. "According to their various kinds" and similar expressions appear several times in Genesis 1. The point seems to be that God created things with distinctions and those distinctions were intended to continue.^{xi} While some use Genesis 1:11 as support against evolution because new things appear at God's command without transitioning from other things, others find support for God-directed evolution in the fact that vegetation and living creatures come out of the land at God's command. God brings new things out of existing matter. How many times does the word "kind(s)" appear in Genesis 1 (NIV)?¹¹

9. The assertion that God made the two great lights—the sun and moon—and the stars in verses 14–18 was revolutionary in the ancient world. Other ancient religions asserted that the sun and

^{ix} Gerald Schroeder with Zola Levitt, *Genesis One: A Physicist Looks at Creation* (Zola Levitt Ministries: 1998), Program 1.

^x Dinesh D'Souza, *What's So Great About God? A Reasonable Defense of the Goodness of God in a World Filled with Suffering* (Carol Streams: Tyndale, 2013), 125.

^{xi} For support see bible.org/netbible — Genesis 1, footnote 32.

moon were gods that should be worshiped. In ancient Egypt, the sun god Ra, was an important deity. Think about hearing these verses in a setting where it was common to worship the sun and moon. How would your life be different if you grew up believing that the sun was a god?^{xii}

10. Regarding our moon, Hugh Ross, a Christian and scientist, believes it is a miracle because it is “fifty times more massive (relative to its planet’s mass) than any other solar system moon.” And according to theoretical modeling, the formation of the moon was due to a massive collision between a body and Earth which produced many “life-favoring changes to our planet.”^{xiii}
11. Verse 16 says, “He also made the stars.” Watch online videos of our neighbor galaxy Andromeda to get an idea of how many stars exist in one galaxy. And Andromeda is only one of more than 100 billion galaxies. When did God make the billions of planets we have discovered? Genesis 1 doesn’t explicitly say, but if Genesis 1:1 means that God made everything, then the planets must have been made in verse 1.
12. The Hebrew word for “great creatures” = *tanninim* (also used in Exod 7:9, Ezek 29:3; Jer 51:34; Isa 27:1.) Some believe it is better translated “big reptiles” or even “dinosaurs.”^{xiv} Others think that dinosaurs are not mentioned in Genesis 1 because the account is focused on God and humans. And since most humans throughout history had no knowledge of dinosaurs, Ross writes, “dinosaurs simply would not make the cut in the creation highlight reel.”^{xv} As a proponent of

^{xii} How important were these verses for human progress? Just five hundred years ago, the Aztecs believed the sun was a god that must be nourished through human sacrifice. By using modern technology we know that the sun and moon are not gods, but how did the author of Genesis know?

^{xiii} Hugh Ross, *Navigating Genesis: A Scientist’s Journey through Genesis 1–11* (Covina: Reasons to Believe, 2014), ch. 6.

^{xiv} Gerald Schroeder, “Top Five Religious Myths Popularly Accepted as Fact,” http://geraldschroeder.com/wordpress/?page_id=79; accessed 4 Mar 2016.

^{xv} Ross, ch. 4.

progressive creationism (see Lesson 22), Ross accepts the standard scientific dates for when dinosaurs roamed the earth at 250 million–65 million years ago.

13. List two or three ideas that you found thought-provoking in this lesson then create a drawing or diagram to help you remember one of them.

Lesson 6: The Day Two Challenge (Gen 1:6–8)

Review: What is unique about the description of day one?

1. In this lesson, we'll engage the challenge presented in day 2 and consider a principle of effective communication called accommodation. Christians and Jews believe Genesis is a part of God's Word. A human wrote it—it's traditionally ascribed to Moses—but God inspired that human to write it. But if God is going to effectively communicate with humans, he will need to accommodate to human limitations. **Accommodation** = making room for a lack of knowledge or a lack of ability to understand. Have you ever been accommodating to someone else in the way you explained something? How so?
2. How would you answer a five-year-old child who asked you, "Where do babies come from?"
3. Here's another question from the five-year-old: "Where does rain come from?"
4. How does an adult communicate with a baby? Sometimes adults talk normally, but other times they talk in a different way known as "baby talk." Some biblical scholars have used that analogy to explain how God communicates with us. But the intellectual distance between an adult and a baby is nothing compared to the distance between God and us. So if God is going to communicate effectively with us, he will have to make room for us by lowering himself to our level. (Invoking this principle can be controversial because what one scholar views as accommodation to an ancient

worldview and therefore not necessary to believe today, another scholar views as a statement from God's Word that must be accepted as factually accurate.)

Be Nice to Old People—Really Old People

5. Ancient people didn't have access to much of the technology that we use today. For example, they didn't have telescopes, cameras, radar, satellites, airplanes, rockets, etc. To help you relate with the distance between us and an ancient person, draw the following below:
 - a. A timeline with the following years labeled: 1000 BC, 1500 AD, the current year
 - b. A person standing above the current year, looking up at the moon and stars through a telescope. (The telescope represents the Enlightenment, which began about 500 years ago and had a major impact on the worldview of everyone who followed.)
 - c. A rectangle labeled Enlightenment around the modern person and extending to 1500 AD
 - d. Another person above 1000 BC
 - e. The ancient person looking up at the sun and moon with bare eyes only

6. We've considered the principle of accommodation because many use that principle in their explanation of Genesis 1:6–8. Highlight the repetition below.

And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day. (Gen 1:6–8)

7. What do you not understand in Genesis 1:6–8?

8. Genesis 1:6–8 are difficult verses to understand for two reasons:

- I. the translation of the Hebrew word *raqia* is disputed (see below)
- II. the fact that we don't believe water exists above the sky as the verses state

I. Raqia in English Bible Versions

First, let's consider how Bible versions translate the Hebrew word *raqia* in Genesis 1. While some translate *raqia* with words that indicate something solid, others use words that signify an opening in space.

Something solid	An opening in space
"firmament" (NKJV, RSV)	"expanse" (NASB, ESV, NET, HCSB)
"dome" (NRSV, CEB)	"space" (NLT)
"vault" (NIV)	"huge space" (NIRV)
"canopy" (ISV)	"horizon" (GW)

Pro Solid

In support of the translation “dome,” ancient people viewed the universe in three levels: heaven, earth, and the underworld. Between heaven and earth they believed a solid-like structure held back water that existed above it. This is known as the three-tiered universe.^{xvi}

Second, the verb *raqa*, from which *raqia* is derived, means to hammer out and it usually refers to hammering out something solid like gold (Exod 39:3). Finally, there are other references in the Old Testament and other ancient literature that suggest ancient people viewed the sky as a solid dome containing heavenly lights with water above it. For example,

- “Can you join him in spreading out the skies, hard as a mirror of cast bronze?” (Job 37:18)
- “Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies.” (Ps 148:4)

Pro Space

Others argue that while ancient people referred to the sky as a solid dome they knew better. That was just one of their figures of speech, just like we refer to sunrise or sunset, but we know that the sun doesn’t actually rise or set. Perhaps it was even their way of speaking poetically. Therefore, the translation “expanse” or “space” is more accurate to what the ancients really believed even though they used a figure of speech that may suggest otherwise. Hugh Ross believes this view is correct and proceeds to identify the space or *raqia* with the troposphere—the layer above the ocean where clouds form.^{xvii}

Obviously, there’s no way for us to get inside an ancient person’s brain to know what they *really* thought, but we do know that they had to understand the world without modern scientific tools.

II. Water above the Heavens?

The second reason these verses are difficult to understand is that they distinguish water under the *raqia* from water above the *raqia*. But today we don’t think of water as being above the expanse or sky.

^{xvi} For more information see Brian Godawa, “Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography in the Bible, Part 5,” *Biologos*, <http://biologos.org/blogs/archive/mesopotamian-cosmic-geography-in-the-bible-part-5>; accessed 3 March 2016.

^{xvii} Ross, ch. 4.

Some think the water above the sky refers to clouds, but there are difficulties with that view. First, the Hebrew word used for “water(s)” is *mayim* and it is used for both entities above and below the raqia. Perhaps it can be argued that one is a different form of water (e.g., vapor) than the other (e.g., liquid). But *mayim* is not the typical Hebrew word used for clouds in the Old Testament. Second, since the two great lights were set in the raqia on the fourth day (vv. 14–17), and water exists *above* the raqia according to the second day, it sounds like water would need to exist above the moon and sun. Those challenges lead some to conclude that we cannot use Genesis 1 to give us an accurate scientific view of the universe. However, astronomers have recently discovered an enormous amount of water, 140 trillion times larger than all the water in the world’s oceans, 12 billion light-years away.^{xviii} And we know that water vapor exists in the Milky Way galaxy, so perhaps the reference to water on the second day can be supported by modern-day science.

Conclusion

While some believers attempt to reconcile a modern understanding of astronomy with Genesis 1:6–8, other believers view much of verses 6–8 as conveying an outdated view of astronomy, which we can no longer affirm. They argue that ancient people believed the universe consisted of three tiers with a dome-like solid-structure holding back water above. And some use the principle of accommodation to explain why this ancient astronomy is included in Scripture. Many people who come to this conclusion don’t lose faith in the message of the Bible because they don’t believe it was written to convey accurate scientific information.^{xix}

Finally, what is the main point of verses 6–8? The main point is that God made the sky (v. 8). Both groups of believers—those who attempt to harmonize these verses with modern science and those who don’t—agree with that point. Think of an ancient person looking up and seeing the big blue canopy-like structure over their head and wondering about its origin. Now think of a person today staring up in wonder at the blue sky on a clear day (knowing it doesn’t contain anything solid). While both are looking up in awe, they can equally accept the primary message of Genesis 1:6–8: God made the sky.

^{xviii} Whitney Clavin and Alan Buis, “Astronomers Find Largest, Most Distant Reservoir of Water,” NASA, accessed June 26, 2017, <https://www.nasa.gov/topics/universe/features/universe20110722.html>.

^{xix} This challenging issue appears several times in the essays found in the book *Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation*.

Lesson 7: The Image of God (Gen 1:26–27)

Review: What are the two basic ways of translating *raqia*?

1. Write out Genesis 1:26–27.

2. Genesis 1:26 conveys a revolutionary idea in the ancient world: humans were created to rule. Other ancient creation stories said that humans were created to be servants or slaves.

3. Genesis 1:27 conveys another revolutionary idea in the ancient world: men and women have the same inherent dignity—both are made in God’s image. *Imago dei* (Latin) = image of God. Imagine reading this verse in an ancient culture that taught men were superior to women. If you are male, how would this idea change your view of the world? If you are female, how would this idea change your view of the world?

4. Genesis 1:26–27 expresses the self-giving nature of God. He made humans in his image and likeness. He didn't have to invest so much of himself in humans, but he wanted to. What do you think it means to be made in God's image?

5. Attempting to answer that question has stirred a lot of controversy. It's probably best to understand being made in God's image and likeness in the following ways.
 - I. **Ontological (our being):** The words "image" and "likeness" were used in the ancient Near East for physical replicas, such as statues.^{xx} When God made humans, he made a replica of himself and put them in the garden. While it's difficult to specify how we resemble God in our various components, the image of God probably encompasses every aspect of our being—spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social, and even physical.

 - II. **Functional:** We were made to function as God's representatives on Earth. While God rules in heaven, he has assigned a certain degree of rulership on Earth to human beings. Notice God's desire for his image-bearers to "rule" (Gen 1:26, 28). That doesn't mean we should dominate and destroy the rest of creation. Instead, we should be responsible rulers over creation.

 - III. **Relational:** We were made to be like God, therefore, we can have a special relationship with him.

 - IV. **Christological:** According to Paul, the ultimate image of God is Christ. Christ is *the* "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15; cf. 2 Cor 4:4), so to be made in God's image means that we were made in Christ, ultimately to be like Christ (Rom 8:29).

6. Explaining the plural pronouns "us" and "our" in God's speech is difficult. Who was God talking to when he said, "Let *us* make mankind in *our* image, in *our* likeness"? Here are three possibilities: 1.) God is speaking to his angelic host, 2.) God is speaking to himself using a plural of deliberation—when a person talks about himself or herself in third person, and 3.) one member of the Trinity is addressing the other two members (e.g., Father speaking to Son and Spirit.)

^{xx} Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ch. 3.

7. **Adam** = man or humanity and is also used as the man's personal name. In Hebrew, there's a slight difference in the way humans are referred to in verses 26 and 27: "Adam" in verse 26 and "the Adam" in verse 27. While many view the addition of the definite article as merely a way of referring to the aforementioned noun (e.g., *the Adam*—the one already mentioned),^{xxi} some believe this minor difference makes a big difference. Referencing *The Guide for the Perplexed* written by Maimonides (AD 1138–1204), Schroeder argues that Homo sapiens without a human soul ("Adam") preceded Homo sapiens with a human soul ("the Adam").^{xxii} In other words, he finds support for the idea of theistic evolution (see Lesson 22) in Genesis 1:26–27. Here's Maimonides quote regarding Adam's children prior to Seth:

Those sons of Adam who were born before that time were not human in the true sense of the word, they had not 'the form of man.' With reference to Seth who had been instructed, enlightened and brought to human perfection, it could rightly be said, 'he (Adam) begat a son in his likeness, in his form.' It is acknowledged that a man who does not possess this 'form' (the nature of which has just been explained) is not human, but a mere animal in human shape and form."^{xxiii}

8. What do you think Maimonides is saying in that passage?¹²
9. Some use Genesis 1:29 to support the idea that God originally intended humans to be vegetarians. While the text certainly promotes a plant-based diet, it doesn't explicitly state that plants were the only thing humans were allowed to eat. Later, God explicitly permitted the eating of meat (see Gen 9:1–4).
10. The phrase *original sin* can be misleading. Sin is not original to creation. Original goodness precedes original sin. In the beginning everything was good and pleasing to God. If everything

^{xxi} See bible.org/netbible – Genesis 1, footnote 53.

^{xxii} Gerald Schroeder, "Top Five Religious Myths Popularly Accepted as Fact," http://geraldschroeder.com/wordpress/?page_id=79; accessed 4 March 2016.

^{xxiii} Moses Maimonides, "The Guide for the Perplexed," Part 1, Chapter 7, trans. M. Friedländer, <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/gfp/gfp017.htm>; accessed 4 March 2016.

wasn't originally good, then God's work of creation was flawed. The final verse of Genesis 1 says, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very _____" (v. 31). How many times does the word good appear in Genesis 1?¹³

11. Make a list of two or three ideas in this lesson that made the biggest impression on you then create a diagram or drawing to help you remember one of them.

12. The next lesson will begin with a quiz. Study Lessons 1–7 and memorize the following verses: Genesis 1:1, 1:27, 1:31. Remember, if you're using this as a self-study course, how you take the quizzes and test is up to you (e.g., open notes, closed notes, or a combination).

Lesson 8: Quiz 1; Reflecting on Genesis 1

Quiz 1 (10 pts. each, out of 70)

For items 1–3, write out the listed verses from memory:

1. Genesis 1:1 –

2. Genesis 1:27 –

3. Genesis 1:31 –

4. Define Elohim –

5. What does God create on each of the six days of creation?

6. Genesis 1:31 teaches original _____.

7. List the names of the four views of the days in Genesis 1.

Answers¹⁴

Reflecting on Genesis 1

1. So far we have learned to study inductively, explored the big picture of Genesis 1, and analyzed specific verses. In this lesson, we will reflect on one teaching in Genesis 1 and then conclude our study of Genesis 1 by considering personal questions.
2. What is your view of matter? Is matter or physical substance, good, evil, or neutral? Is it real or unreal? Why?
3. Genesis 1 is world-embracing because it affirms the goodness and reality of matter. But several other belief systems differ with this view of the physical world.
 - a. **Hinduism** – all matter is ultimately **maya** = cosmic illusion. Despite what our senses tell us, there are not many different things in the world; there is only one reality—all is one, all is Brahman. **Brahman** = the impersonal source and eternal essence of everything.
 - b. **Jainism** – there are two basic entities in the world, which all living things possess: 1.) **jiva** = souls (all souls are pure) 2.) **ajiva** = matter (all matter is evil). The goal of life is to free the jiva from the ajiva.
 - c. **Platonism** – there are two worlds: 1.) the world of **Ideas**, containing the eternal and unchanging forms (e.g., the idea of a chair or “chairness”), 2.) the world of **matter**, containing physical substances that are constantly changing and are ultimately unreal (e.g., physical chairs).
 - d. **Gnosticism** – all matter comes from the ignorant and proud Creator called **Demuirge**, therefore matter is evil. Certain human beings have a pure and enlightened spiritual nature.
4. Reflect on Genesis 1 by answering the following questions. (See the answers for question 1; questions 2–9 are personal reflection questions.)

Reflection Questions

1. What are the big ideas in Genesis 1?¹⁵
2. Why do we need a beginning?
3. How do you feel when you miss the first ten minutes of a movie?
4. What do you like about Genesis 1? Why?

5. What do you dislike about Genesis 1? Why?

6. If you could witness one of the days of creation, which one would you choose? Why?

7. How does Genesis 1 make you feel? Why?

8. Take 5–10 minutes and draw anything in Genesis 1. (Or look at famous works of art on Genesis 1 online.)

ANSWERS

1 Since the bird is feeding and protecting the babies, the bird is probably the mother.

2 Because we get bored and easily distracted.

3 To be good at anything we must be good observers. For example, good thinkers, detectives, and artists are good observers. They're able to see details that most people miss. Have you watched the show *Monk* or read *Sherlock Holmes*? Both characters are great detectives because they see what other people miss. Likewise, great artists are able to see things in a tree or landscape that others fail to notice. Claude Monet, for example, noticed how the rising and setting sun affected a church building. And his observations led to thirty-one different paintings of the same building as seen during different times of the day. Instead of observing physical objects, we'll be observing the words, phrases, and sentences of Scripture.

4 No, everything we make is ultimately a discovery or new application of something that was already here.

5

- God/he/him (~ 30x)
- And God said (six times – vv. 3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24) begins each day. “Then God said” (two times – vv. 11, 26). “God blessed them and said” (two times – vv. 22, 28). This gives us a total of ten references to God’s speech in Genesis 1. Many have noted a connection between these ten words and the Ten Commandments: God’s ten words started the world and God’s ten commands ordered the way his people should live.
- God created/made
- God called
- God saw that it was good (and very good)
- God blessed
- Evening and morning
- And it was so
- According to their kinds
- Let there/them
- Light
- Darkness

6 Forming and Filling

7

- “And God said”
- “Let there be”
- “And it was so”
- “And God saw that it was good”
- “And there was evening and there was morning”

8 In contrast with some religions and philosophies that view the physical world as evil, it shows that matter or the physical world is fundamentally good.

9 Some think this makes a big difference to a person’s faith because if we get the first chapter of the Bible wrong that could lead to misunderstanding the rest of the Bible. However, others say it doesn’t matter because the main point is still the same: God created everything.

10 It indicates a bird-like movement and it seems to show that the Spirit was preparing to swoop down and accomplish something.

11 9

12 He seems to be saying that the character of those who preceded Seth was not human. For example, Cain did not act according to the true human nature, and as a result, became animal-like.

13 6

14 Quiz 1

1. Check Bible
2. Check Bible
3. Check Bible
4. God
5. God creates:
 - Day 1 – Light
 - Day 2 – Sky
 - Day 3 – Land and Seas
 - Vegetation
 - Day 4 – Luminaries (sun, moon, stars)
 - Day 5 – Fish & Fowl
 - Day 6 – Land Animals
 - Human Beings
6. goodness
7. 24-hour calendar day, age-day, analogical, literary framework

15

- One God made everything. (This conflicts with polytheism—the belief in many gods—that permeated the ancient world. According to that view, the world was ruled by many gods, who were each in charge of distinct parts of this world. Genesis dismisses all other gods and confronts us with an all-powerful God.)
- There’s a distinction between the Creator and creation. We shouldn’t confuse the two by worshiping the sun, trees, or human beings. (Again, this was a revolutionary idea in the ancient world where, for example, the sun or the king was identified as a god.)
- God’s word is powerful and creative.
- Original goodness. Everything was good in the beginning. God didn’t make a mistake nor was anything made accidentally.
- Human beings have a special connection to God. We bear his image.
- God likes order. The work of creation is portrayed as an orderly process.