RETHINKING THE GOSPEL · STUDENT GUIDE

A **Rethinking the Gospel** study. This guide goes with a teaching session from Rethinking the Gospel. Watch the sessions, download the study materials, and find more teaching at **rethinkingthegospel.com**.

Genesis 1:1–2:3

Creation as Cosmic Temple

Use this guide to follow the teaching session, copy key points, and keep your own notes. Scripture quotations are from the Berean Standard Bible (BSB). The BSB does not include the Apocrypha, so quotations from those books are from the World English Bible (WEB). Citations in parentheses point to the books behind the teaching, listed at the end.

> *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."*
>
> GENESIS 1:1

SECTION 1

Introducing Genesis

The name

In Hebrew the book is called *Bereshit* ("In the beginning"), after its first word. The English title "Genesis" ("origin") came to us from the Greek Septuagint through the Latin Vulgate (Sarna, 1989, p. xi). Genesis is a book of origins: of humanity, of the people Israel, and of the relationship between God and that people (Sarna, 1989, p. xii).

Who wrote it?

Genesis is anonymous. It carries no author's name or date (Enns & Byas, 2019, p. 6). Two main views:

- **Mosaic authorship (traditional).** Jewish and Christian tradition credit Genesis to Moses as the first of the five books of Torah. Jesus and the apostles speak of the Torah as "Moses" (Mark 12:26; Luke 24:27; John 5:46).
- **Later compilation (critical scholarship).** Some details read as written after Moses: his death and burial (Deut 34), "at that time the Canaanites were in the land" (Gen 12:6; cf. 13:7), and kings of Edom listed "before any king reigned over the Israelites" (Gen 36:31). Many scholars hold that the Pentateuch reached its final form after the exile, after 539 BC, drawing on much older written and oral traditions (Enns & Byas, 2019, pp. 6–8).

Common ground: the traditions in Genesis are very old and were not rewritten to fit later law. Jacob sets up a sacred pillar that later law forbids, and the patriarchs marry in ways the Torah later prohibits (Sarna, 1989, pp. xiii–xv). Genesis has come down to us as one coherent book (Sarna, 1989, p. xvi; Provan, 2015, p. 60).

When was it written — and why does that matter?

Knowing when and to whom a story was told makes us better readers (Enns & Byas, 2019, p. 5). Genesis 1 speaks with special force to two audiences:

AUDIENCE	THEIR WORLD	WHAT GENESIS 1 TOLD THEM
Israel leaving Egypt (Moses' generation)	Egypt's sun-god, Pharaoh as the god's image, Israel as slave labor	The sun is a lamp, every human is God's image, and the Creator gives his people rest

AUDIENCE	THEIR WORLD	WHAT GENESIS 1 TOLD THEM
Israel in exile in Babylon (586–539 BC)	Marduk's victory over Tiamat, astrology, pressure to adopt Babylon's gods	Israel's God, not Babylon's, tamed the chaos — alone, without a fight, by his word (Enns & Byas, 2019, pp. 10, 23–26)

Either way, the patriarchs' roots in Mesopotamia and the spread of Babylonian literature across Canaan make it unlikely the writer was unaware of Babylon's myths (Wenham, 1987). The date matters because Genesis 1 is an **answer** to the stories Israel's neighbors told.

Genres in Genesis

Genesis is mostly narrative, but it mixes several kinds of writing:

- **Exalted prose / liturgy** — Gen 1:1–2:3 is a carefully patterned, almost hymn-like prologue (Provan, 2015, p. 60; Wenham, 1987).
- **Narrative** — the stories of Eden, the flood, the patriarchs, and Joseph.
- **Genealogy** — ten *toledot* headings ("These are the generations of…") divide the book: 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2 (Enns & Byas, 2019, pp. 13–14).
- **Poetry** — e.g., 2:23; 4:23–24; 9:25–27; 49:2–27.
- **Blessings, oracles, and covenant** — 12:1–3; 15; 17; 27; 48–49.

Why genre matters. Every kind of writing comes with its own rules for how it should be read, and the author expects us to know them. We don't read a love poem as a medical report, or a parable as a news story. If a psalm says God "stretches out the heavens like a tent" (Ps 104:2), no one asks what fabric the sky is made of. Reading Scripture the wrong way can make it say something its author never meant. If we read a carefully patterned hymn like Genesis 1 as a laboratory report, we end up arguing about questions the writer was not asking and miss what he was saying about God, the world, and us. Asking "What kind of writing is this?" is the first step to hearing the author on his own terms. It is a way of honoring the text, not a way of avoiding it.

Big picture: Gen 1–11 is the prologue to the story that begins with Abraham in Gen 12 (Sarna, 1989, p. xii). Genesis is book one of a five-book story whose climax is Sinai (Enns & Byas, 2019, pp. 2–3).

SECTION 2

Not a science book

Genesis 1 answers the questions ancient Israel was asking — *Who* made the world? *Why*? *What are humans for?* — not the modern question of *how* matter, energy, and life came to be. It speaks to the nature of God, the world, and the human person, not to physics, chemistry, and biology (Provan, 2015, p. 67).

What Israel was asking

- **Which god is responsible for the world?** Every nation had its gods. Genesis 1 declares that Israel's God alone made and rules everything (Enns & Byas, 2019, p. 26).
- **What is the world for?** An ordered home, fit for life and for God's presence.
- **What is a human being?** Not a slave of the gods but God's own image, blessed to rule (Sarna, 1989, p. xii).

Signs the text is not answering modern questions

- **Light before the sun.** Days 1–3 have evening and morning, but the sun and moon arrive on day 4. Origen already asked how that could be (Provan, 2015, p. 61). The order makes a theological point: God, not the sun, is the source of light (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 61).
- **Sequence is not the point.** The writer's concern is the importance of humanity, not chronology (Provan, 2015, p. 61). Wenham warns against matching scientific theories to these verses (Wenham, 1987).
- **The days as a literary framework.** Waltke judges the framework reading — the days show creation's order and invite God's people to imitate the Creator — the best fit for the text's theological focus (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 61).
- **An ancient picture of the world.** Israel, like its neighbors, pictured a flat earth under a solid dome (the "expanse" or firmament) holding back the "waters above," with waters below and around (Enns & Byas, 2019, pp. 23, 28–29). God speaks to Israel in the picture of the world they already had.

Functional, not material, creation

John Walton argues that Genesis 1 is an account of **functional origins**, not material origins. It tells how God gave the cosmos its functions and made it work for people, not how matter came into being (Walton, 2009, pp. 162–163).

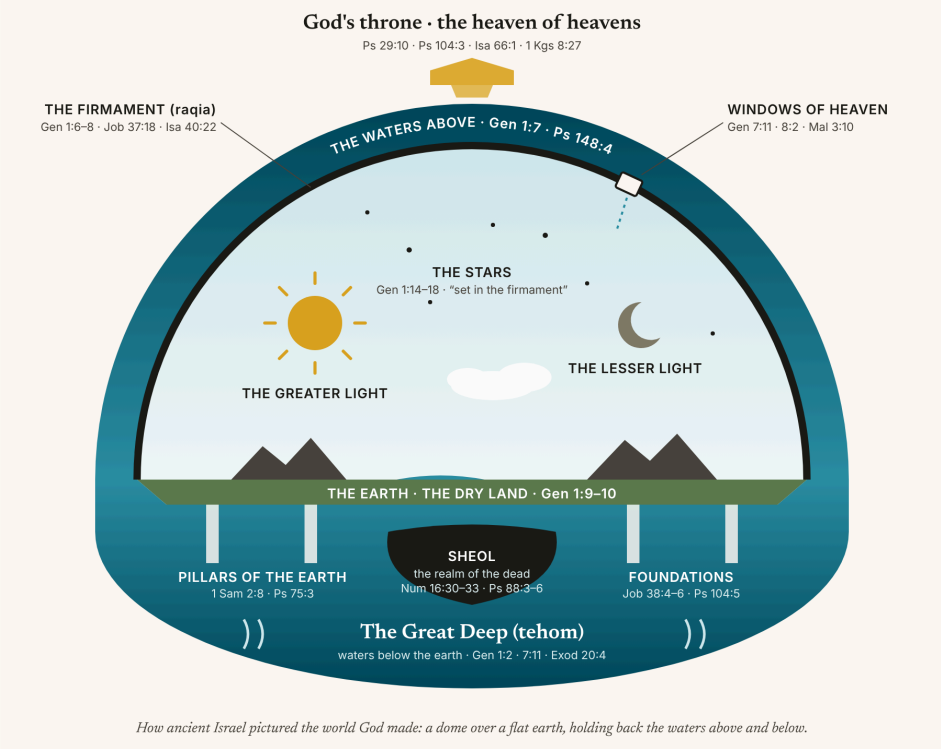
- **To exist meant to function.** In the ancient world, something existed when it had a function in an ordered system (Walton, 2009, p. 38). Ancient Near Eastern creation texts make almost nothing material; the gods make the cosmos operational (Walton, 2009, p. 35).
- **What *bara'* ("create") does.** God is always the subject of *bara'*, about fifty times in the Old Testament (Walton, 2009, p. 40). Its objects are often not material things: people, groups, phenomena such as darkness, even a clean heart. Many contexts require a functional sense (Walton, 2009, pp. 41–43).
- **"In the beginning" is a period, not a moment.** The Hebrew word usually introduces a span of time, here the seven days. Verse 1 introduces the account, and 2:1 closes it (Walton, 2009, p. 45). Walton's expanded rendering of 1:1 runs, in short: in the initial period, God created by assigning functions throughout the heavens and the earth (Walton, 2009, p. 46).
- **The starting point has no functions.** In 1:2 matter is already there (the waters of the deep), but nothing works yet. *Tohu* describes what is unproductive and without purpose, not what lacks shape (Tsumura, as cited in Walton, 2009, p. 48; Walton, 2009, p. 49).
- **"Good" means ready to function.** "It is not good for the man to be alone" (2:18) is about function, not moral perfection. So "it was good" means the cosmos is ready to work for people (Walton, 2009, p. 51).
- **Day 7 is a temple inauguration.** God rests in the cosmos as in his temple, the place he lives and rules from. Walton calls this the "cosmic temple inauguration" view (Walton, 2009, pp. 162–163).

PART OF GENESIS 1	WALTON'S FUNCTIONAL READING (WALTON, 2009, P. 163)
Bara' ("create")	Assigning functions
Starting point (1:2)	No functions yet, not no material
Days 1–3	The three great functions of life: time, weather, food
Days 4–6	Functionaries receive their roles and spheres
"It is good"	Functioning well for people
Day 7	God rests in his cosmic temple

An important caveat. Walton does not deny that God made matter. He believes God made all matter and that material origins at some point involved creation out of nothing. His claim is about what Genesis 1 is describing (Walton, 2009, p. 44). Because the text gives no mechanism for

material origins, he leaves room for science to explore them (Walton, 2009, p. 163). Not every scholar agrees: Sarna reads Genesis as pointing toward creation from nothing (Sarna, 1989, p. 5).

The ancient picture of the world



How ancient Israel pictured the world God made: a dome over a flat earth, holding back the waters above and below.

PART	WHAT ISRAEL PICTURED
Waters above	An ocean stored above the sky (Gen 1:7; 7:11)
Firmament (*raqia*)	A dome "spread out" over the earth, carrying sun, moon, and stars
Earth	Land and seas at the center, set on pillars or foundations
Waters below	The great deep (*tehom*) under and around the earth
Sheol	The realm of the dead beneath the earth

(Adapted from Enns & Byas, 2019, p. 23.)

Two mistakes to avoid (Enns & Byas, 2019, p. 28):

1. Dismissing Genesis 1 as a quaint relic.
2. Forcing it to be a modern science textbook.

Both sell it short. Belief in a good, ordered creation actually helped create the conditions for modern science (Provan, 2015, p. 67).

SECTION 3

Verse-by-verse overview

A walk through Genesis 1:1–2:3, section by section.

Watch for the repeated formulas (Wenham, 1987): "And God said" (10×) · "Let there be" (8×) · "and it was so" (7×) · "God made" (7×) · "God saw that it was good" (7×) · naming or blessing (7×) · numbered days. Gen 2:1–3 repeats the key words of 1:1 (created, God, the heavens and the earth) in reverse order, bracketing the whole passage.

1:1 — "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This verse is the headline of the whole account. "Beginning" (*reshit*) names a period, not a moment: the initial period of the seven days themselves. Verse 1 introduces the account rather than describing a separate first act, and 2:1 closes it (Walton, 2009, pp. 45–46). *Bara'* ("create") only ever has God as its subject (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 59). "The heavens and the earth" is a merism, two opposites that together mean *everything* (Sarna, 1989, p. 5). And God has no origin story, no theogony (Sarna, 1989, p. 5). A different view: Wenham reads "beginning" as the start of time itself, the first moment of creation, with verse 1 describing God's first creative act (Wenham, 1987).

1:2 — "Now the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters." This is the starting condition: *tohu vavohu* (unformed and empty), darkness, and the deep (*tehom*), a world unable to sustain life (Provan, 2015, p. 63). The Spirit "hovers" over it like an eagle over its young (Deut 32:11; Sarna, 1989, p. 6). The Hebrew ruach can mean "wind," "breath," or "spirit," so some translations read "a wind from God" (as Jewish versions often do) or "the Wind of God" (Wenham). Wind is a concrete picture of God's invisible, life-giving presence: the same wind later pushes back the flood (Gen 8:1) and parts the sea (Exod 14:21) (Sarna, 1989, p. 6; Wenham, 1987).

1:3–5 — Day 1: "Let there be light," and there was light. God creates by speaking, and his command fulfils itself (Sarna, 1989, p. 7). He **separates** light from darkness and **names** them, and naming shows his rule (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 56). Evening comes before morning because the Hebrew day began at dusk (Wenham, 1987).

1:6–8 — Day 2: the expanse. The expanse (*raqia*) — "firmament" in older translations — separates the waters above from the waters below, and God names it "sky." Its job is to hold the waters in their place (Wenham, 1987).

1:9–13 — Day 3: dry land and plants. The waters are gathered so that dry land appears, and God names Earth and Seas. The earth "brings forth" vegetation "according to its kind," but only at God's word (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 62). Day 3 has two acts.

1:14–19 — Day 4: the lights. The sun and moon go unnamed; they are simply "the greater light" and "the lesser light." They exist as "signs to mark the seasons" (*mo'adim*, Israel's appointed

feasts) (Wenham, 1987; Sarna, 1989, p. 9). The stars get a single phrase: "And He made the stars as well."

1:20–23 — Day 5: sea creatures and birds. The waters teem only because God commands it (Sarna, 1989, p. 10). The "great sea creatures" (*tanninim*, sea monsters) are just creatures. God **blesses** them: "Be fruitful and multiply."

1:24–25 — Day 6a: land animals. God makes livestock, land crawlers, and beasts of the earth "according to their kinds." No blessing is spoken over them (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 64).

1:26–28 — Day 6b: humanity. "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." This is the only time God announces his intent in advance (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 64). Humans, male and female, are made to represent God by ruling (*radah*) and subduing (*kavash*) (Provan, 2015, p. 65). God blesses them and gives them their task.

1:29–31 — Day 6c: food and "very good." God gives plants for food to humans and animals: he feeds them. Only now is creation called "very good." That is not a static perfection but a world ready for human work (Provan, 2015, pp. 63–64). God's "very good" does not cancel the commission he has just given: "fill the earth and subdue it; rule over..." (1:28). Even a very good world still needs to be ruled and subdued, so its goodness is the starting point for human work, not a finished state.

2:1 — "Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array." The work is complete. The word "completed" returns when Israel finishes the tabernacle (Exod 39:32).

2:2 — "And by the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on that day He rested from all His work." God ceases (*shavat*). Since he created by speaking, his rest is a ceasing of speech (Provan, 2015, p. 62).

2:3 — "Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it." The first thing God makes holy is a span of time, and the seventh day has no "evening and morning."

SECTION 4

The problem God solves: *tohu vavohu*

> **GENESIS 1:2** Now the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

Verse 2 names the problem the rest of the chapter solves: an earth that cannot sustain life. It is a dark, watery abyss hostile to life (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 60).

Four features of the problem

HEBREW	MEANING	WHERE ELSE IT APPEARS
tohu [TOH-hoo] ("formless")	Unformed, disordered; the trackless desert where travelers are lost (Wenham, 1987). Walton: "unproductive," without purpose (Walton, 2009, pp. 48–49)	Deut 32:10; Job 6:18; Isa 45:18
bohu [VOH-hoo] ("void")	Empty, unfilled; always paired with *tohu*	Isa 34:11; Jer 4:23
choshek [kho-SHEKH] ("darkness")	Everything opposed to God: wickedness, judgment, death (Wenham, 1987)	Exod 10:21; Ps 88:12; Prov 2:13
tehom [teh-HOME] ("the deep")	The cosmic ocean — not a rival power, but part of creation that obeys God (Wenham, 1987; Sarna, 1989, p. 6)	Ps 104:6; Prov 8:24, 27–28

Together: *tohu vavohu* is best heard as "total chaos" (Wenham, 1987) — the opposite of an ordered, inhabited world. Think *chaos*, not *nothing* (Enns & Byas, 2019, pp. 20–21).

Isaiah names God's purpose

> **ISAIAH 45:18** For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens—He is God; He formed the earth and fashioned it; He established it; He did not create it to be empty [*tohu*], but formed it to be inhabited: "I am the LORD, and there is no other."

God's goal was never *tohu*. It was an inhabited world.

When creation runs backward

> **JEREMIAH 4:23** I looked at the earth, and it was formless and void; I looked to the heavens, and they had no light.

Jeremiah describes judgment on Judah as Genesis 1 undone — a return to primal chaos (Sarna, 1989, p. 6). Sin unmakes the world; God's word remakes it.

Jesus uses the same language of creation coming undone when he speaks of coming judgment:

> **MATTHEW 24:29** Immediately after the tribulation of those days: 'The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.'

His words draw on the prophets, who described the fall of nations as the lights of day 4 going dark (Isa 13:10; 34:4; Joel 2:10; Ezek 32:7–8). When God judges, the world is pictured as sliding back toward the darkness of Genesis 1:2.

A question to hold: creation "out of nothing"?

Genesis 1:2 never says where the dark waters came from (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 59; Enns & Byas, 2019, p. 20). Readers have taken this in different ways:

- Verse 1 is God's first act of creation, and vv. 2–3 describe what follows (Wenham, 1987).
- Verse 1 is a summary heading, and verse 2 describes what was there when God began to order it (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 60; Provan, 2015, p. 63). Walton adds that Genesis 1 describes functional, not material, origins, though he affirms that God made all matter (Walton, 2009, pp. 44–45).
- Creation from nothing is first stated outright in 2 Maccabees 7:28, but Genesis points toward it by making God the sole Creator of everything (Sarna, 1989, p. 5; cf. Heb 11:3; Col 1:16).

Whichever reading we take, the chapter's emphasis is the same: God turns what is unformed and empty into a home full of life.

God's solution, in five verbs

1. **Speak** — "And God said"
2. **Separate** — light from darkness, waters from waters, sea from land
3. **Name** — Day, Night, Heaven, Earth, Seas
4. **Fill** — lights, birds, fish, animals, humans
5. **Bless** — creatures, humans, and the seventh day

SECTION 5

Forming and filling

The six days answer the two halves of the problem: days 1–3 **form** what was *tohu*; days 4–6 **fill** what was *bohu* (Provan, 2015, p. 62; Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 57; Enns & Byas, 2019, p. 21).

FORMING THE REALMS — THE SPACES GOD BUILDS (ANSWERS *TOHU*)	FILLING THE REALMS — THE RULERS AND RESIDENTS OF EACH SPACE (ANSWERS *BOHU*)
Day 1 — Light separated from darkness	**Day 4** — Sun, moon, and stars to rule day and night
Day 2 — Expanse (firmament) separating the waters above and below	**Day 5** — Birds of the air and creatures of the sea
Day 3 — Dry land and plants *(two acts)*	**Day 6** — Land animals and humanity *(two acts)*

(Pattern from Sarna, 1989, p. 4, and Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 57, who call the two columns "the Resource" and "the Utilizer.")

What the pattern shows

- **Each filler rules its matching realm.** Sun and moon govern day and night; humanity, at the head of all, governs the earth (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 57).
- **It builds as it goes.** Days 1 and 4 have one act, days 2 and 5 one act with two parts, days 3 and 6 two separate acts (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 58).
- **Freedom increases.** The lights move on fixed paths, animals move by instinct, and humans have the greatest freedom (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 58).
- **Humans come last, as the crown.** Everything is prepared in advance for them (Provan, 2015, pp. 60–61; Sarna, 1989, p. 11).

Theological implications

1. God creates by his word. Nothing resists him; there is no struggle. God's word, working with his Spirit, overcomes chaos and emptiness (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 56; cf. Ps 33:6, 9; 2 Cor 4:6).

2. God brings order through boundaries. He separates light and dark, waters and land, and creatures "according to their kinds." When each thing keeps its place, there is order instead of chaos (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 56). Later, Israel will be called to separate holy from common and clean from unclean (Lev 10:10; 20:24–26; Wenham, 1987).

3. Naming is ruling. God names Day, Night, Heaven, Earth, and Seas (days 1–3). To name something is to show authority over it (Wenham, 1987; cf. Gen 2:19–20).

4. Nature is not divine. The earth "brings forth" and the waters "teem" only at God's command. Nothing in nature has power of its own to produce life (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, pp. 62–63; Sarna, 1989, p. 9).

5. Time is ordered for worship. The lights mark "seasons" (*mo'adim*), the word used for Israel's appointed feasts (Lev 23:2, 4). Creation's calendar is a worship calendar (Wenham, 1987; Enns & Byas, 2019, p. 24).

6. Humans are God's royal image. Ancient kings set up images of themselves to show their rule. In Genesis every human — male and female — is God's image, representing him by ruling his world (Enns & Byas, 2019, p. 25; Provan, 2015, pp. 65, 76).

7. Dominion means care, not domination. "Rule" is kingship language, and in Israel the king serves his people's welfare under God (Ps 72; Provan, 2015, p. 66).

8. "Very good" means ready for work. The good world still holds forces to be ordered and progress to be made — that is why humans are told to subdue it (Provan, 2015, pp. 63–64). Walton notes that "good" in Genesis is about function, as in "It is not good for the man to be alone" (2:18): the cosmos is ready to work for people (Walton, 2009, p. 51).

SECTION 6

The seventh day

> **GENESIS 2:1–3** Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. And by the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on that day He rested from all His work. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on that day He rested from all the work of creation that He had accomplished.

Why day seven is different

DAYS 1–6	DAY 7
"And God said..."	God says nothing — his rest is a ceasing of speech (Provan, 2015, p. 62)
Something new is made	Nothing new is made; the work is "finished"
"And there was evening, and there was morning..."	No evening and morning — the day is left open
Creatures and humans are blessed	A **day** is blessed and **sanctified** — the first thing God makes holy is time
Mentioned once each	"The seventh day" is said three times; Gen 2:1–3 has 35 Hebrew words (5 × 7) (Wenham, 1987)

The rest of God

God does not rest because he is tired (Isa 40:28). In the Bible, God's "rest" is his settling into his dwelling, on his throne:

> **PSALM 132:14** “This is My resting place forever and ever; here I will dwell, for I have desired this home.”

> **ISAIAH 66:1–2** This is what the LORD says: “Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me? Or where will My place of repose be? Has not My hand made all these things? And so they came into being,” declares the LORD. “This is the one I will esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at My word.”

Isaiah puts the pieces together: all of creation is God's throne room and his place of rest, so no building can hold him. The one he looks to is the humble person who trembles at his word.

In the ancient world, a seven-day pattern marked the dedication of a temple, after which the god took up residence (Sarna, 1989, p. 4). Genesis 1 presents the whole cosmos as God's house, finished and occupied. Walton calls this the "cosmic temple inauguration": over seven days the cosmos receives its functions as God's temple, and on the seventh day God rests in it, the place from which he lives and rules (Walton, 2009, pp. 162–163).

What God's rest means for us: trust

God's rest is the pattern for human rest. To stop working one day in seven is to trust that God, not our labor, is the provider.

> **EXODUS 16:29** Understand that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day He will give you bread for two days.
>
> **LEVITICUS 25:20–21** Now you may wonder, 'What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not sow or gather our produce?' But I will send My blessing upon you in the sixth year, so that the land will yield a crop sufficient for three years.

Rest is an act of faith: God provides enough, and more than enough, for those who stop.

Three blessings in Genesis 1

BLESSING	WHAT IS BLESSED	WHAT THE BLESSING DOES
1:22	Sea creatures and birds	"Be fruitful and multiply" — life that overcomes death (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 63)
1:28	Humanity, male and female	Fruitfulness **plus** a commission to fill, subdue, and rule
2:3	The seventh day	Blessing is tied to fruitfulness, so the Sabbath is fruitful in its own way — apart from human effort. Those who keep it share its blessing simply by resting (Provan, 2015, p. 67)

Notice: the land animals receive no spoken blessing; humans are blessed to rule them (Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 64). And in Gen 1–5, *bara'* ("create") keeps appearing beside *barak* ("bless"), a link that leads to God's blessing of Abram in 12:1–3 (Pennant, as cited in Wenham, 1987).

The Sabbath pattern: from creation to tabernacle and temple

- **Seven speeches.** God's instructions for the tabernacle come in seven speeches ("Then the LORD said to Moses…"), and the seventh is about the Sabbath (Exod 25–31; 31:12–17).
- **The Spirit builds.** As the Spirit hovered over creation (1:2), the Spirit fills Bezalel to build the tabernacle (Exod 31:1–5; Sailhamer, as cited in Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, p. 60).
- **Finished, blessed, filled.** "So all the work for the tabernacle… was completed"; Moses inspected it and "blessed them"; then "the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exod 39:32, 43; 40:33–34).
- **Lamps.** The word for the "lights" of day 4 (*ma'or*) is used elsewhere in the Torah only for the tabernacle lamp (Wenham, 1987).
- **Solomon's temple.** Built in seven years, dedicated in the seventh month at a seven-day feast (1 Kgs 6:38; 8:2, 65), and called "a house as a resting place" for God (1 Chr 28:2; Ps 132:8, 14).

The Sabbath pattern in the Torah

- **The fourth commandment** grounds Sabbath in creation (Exod 20:8–11) and in deliverance from slavery (Deut 5:12–15).
- **A covenant sign** between God and Israel: "for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, but on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed" (Exod 31:13–17).
- **The appointed times** (*mo'adim*) of Lev 23 begin with the weekly Sabbath (23:3).
- **Sabbath for the land** every seventh year, and the **Jubilee** after seven sevens (Lev 25:1–17).
- **Exile as the land's Sabbath** — Israel's failure to give the land rest is named as a reason for the exile (Lev 26:34–35; 2 Chr 36:21). For the exiles reading Genesis, the seventh day carried a sharp reminder.

Looking ahead: the New Testament picks up the theme of God's rest in Christ (Matt 11:28; Mark 2:27–28; Luke 4:18–19; Heb 4:1–11).

SECTION 7

Reading Genesis 1 against the ancient Near East

Israel lived among nations with their own creation stories. Genesis 1 uses much of the same picture of the world — dark waters, a sky holding back the waters above, lights, a temple, a god at rest — but tells it so differently that it openly rejects those stories. Wenham agrees with Heidel that Genesis carries "a conscious and deliberate anti-mythical polemic" (Heidel, as cited in Wenham, 1987). The writer is not borrowing myths; he is answering them.

The neighbors' stories

- ***Enuma Elish* (Babylon).** Opens "when on high the heaven had not been named" (Sarna, 1989, p. 7). The gods are born from the mingling of fresh and salt waters. The young god Marduk defeats the sea-goddess Tiamat, splits her body in two, and uses half to hold back the waters above (Enns & Byas, 2019, p. 25). Humans are made from the blood of a slain rebel god to do the gods' work, and Marduk is enthroned in his temple in Babylon.
- ***Atrahasis* (Babylon).** The lesser gods tire of digging the canals and rebel. Humans are made from clay and a slain god's blood to take over the labor so the gods can rest. When human noise disturbs the gods, they send plague, famine, and finally a flood (Enns & Byas, 2019, pp. 26–27).
- **Egypt.** The world rises out of the dark waters of Nun as a primeval mound. The sun-god is chief among the gods, and Pharaoh is the god's living image. Some Egyptian motifs resemble Genesis, though Wenham doubts Genesis depends on them (Notter, as cited in Wenham, 1987).
- **Ugarit (Canaan).** The storm-god Baal battles Yam (the Sea), whose allies include the sea monsters Tannin and Leviathan (Sarna, 1989, p. 10).
- **Temple texts.** Gudea of Lagash dedicated a temple with a seven-day feast, and other texts use six days of action with a climax on the seventh (Sarna, 1989, p. 4).

What the stories of Israel and the ANE share

Genesis 1 and *Enuma Elish* share real features: darkness and waters before creation, light before the sun, a barrier holding back the waters, and a similar order ending in rest (Enns & Byas, 2019, p.

24). Israel spoke about creation in the shared language of its world. The difference lies in **who God is** and **what humans are**.

The polemic, passage by passage

GENESIS	WHAT THE NEIGHBORS SAID	WHAT GENESIS SAYS INSTEAD
1:1 "In the beginning God created"	The gods are born; they have parents, rivals, and histories	God simply *is*. No birth, no family, no rivals — God stands outside time and space (Sarna, 1989, p. 5)
1:2 "the deep" (*tehom*)	Tiamat, the sea-goddess, is chaos personified	*Tehom* is linguistically related to Tiamat, but here it is just water — passive, waiting, fully demythologized (Sarna, 1989, p. 6; Provan, 2015, p. 63)
1:3 "And God said"	Order comes through divine war; one god imposes his will by force (Sarna, 1989, p. 3)	No battle. God speaks, and it is so — swiftly, alone, without effort (Enns & Byas, 2019, p. 21)
1:5, 8, 10 God "called"	In *Enuma Elish* to exist is to be named	God does the naming, and naming shows his rule over each realm (Sarna, 1989, p. 7; Wenham, 1987)
1:6–8 the expanse (firmament)	Marduk splits Tiamat's corpse to make the sky barrier	God makes the expanse by command; the gods "struggle" to separate the waters, God does not (Wenham, 1987)
1:11–12, 20, 24 "Let the earth bring forth… Let the waters teem"	Earth and water are divine powers; fertility is worshiped	The earth and waters produce life only at God's word. Nature is stripped of divinity — no room for fertility cults (Sarna, 1989, pp. 9–10; Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, pp. 62–63)
1:14–18 "two great lights… And He made the stars as well"	Sun and moon are high gods (Shamash, Sin; Re in Egypt); the stars govern human destiny	The sun and moon are not even named — just "the greater light" and "the lesser light," lamps that mark time for worship. The stars get a passing clause, a quiet rejection of astrology (Wenham, 1987; Waltke & Fredricks, 2001, pp. 62–63; Sarna, 1989, p. 10)
1:21 "God created the great sea creatures" (*tanninim [tan-nee-NEEM]*)	Sea dragons are divine rivals who must be defeated	The sea monsters are creatures God made — introduced with *bara'* — and blessed (Wenham, 1987; Sarna, 1989, p. 10)
1:26–27 "in Our image… male and female"	Only the king is the god's image; ordinary humans are an afterthought made for labor	Every human, male and female, is God's royal image — a statement of human equality (Enns & Byas, 2019, pp. 25–26)

GENESIS	WHAT THE NEIGHBORS SAID	WHAT GENESIS SAYS INSTEAD
1:28–29 "God blessed them… They will be yours for food"	Humans exist to feed the gods through offerings	God blesses humanity and **feeds them**; humanity is creation's goal, not its afterthought (Wenham, 1987)
2:2–3 "He rested… blessed… sanctified"	The gods rest once humans take over their toil; the victor rests in his temple	God rests because his work is complete, and gives rest as a blessing — later even to servants and animals (Exod 20:10–11; Deut 5:14–15)

The bottom line

Genesis 1 is a statement of faith: the God of a small, often captive people — not the gods of the empires — tamed the chaos and filled the world (Enns & Byas, 2019, pp. 26, 28). And it is more than an argument. It invites every person to worship the one God who made them in his image (Wenham, 1987).

SECTION 8

Echoes across Scripture

Later writers of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Apocrypha, and the New Testament keep returning to Genesis 1. Column 2 gives one example from each, marked as a **quotation**, **echo** (clear verbal borrowing), or **allusion** (a looser reference). Column 3 lists more passages to read. **Bold** references in column 3 are drawn from the commentaries behind this study; the rest are added.

GENESIS	THREE KEY ECHOES	MORE TO READ
1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth	**Hebrew:** Neh 9:6 *(echo)* — "You created the heavens… the earth and all that is on it." **Apocrypha:** 2 Macc 7:28 *(allusion)* — God "made them not of things that were." **NT:** John 1:1–3 *(echo)* — "In the beginning was the Word… Through Him all things were made."	**Isa 40:21**, **41:4**, **65:17**, **Jer 23:24**, **Deut 3:24**, **Prov 8:22–31**, Ps 102:25, Isa 42:5, Sir 18:1, Wis 9:1, **Acts 17:24–28**, **Col 1:16**, **Heb 11:3**, Rev 4:11, Rev 10:6
1:2 formless and void… the deep… the Spirit of God was hovering	**Hebrew:** Jer 4:23 *(echo)* — "formless and void… they had no light." **Apocrypha:** Wis 11:17 *(allusion)* — God's hand "created the world out of formless matter." **NT:** 2 Pet 3:5 *(allusion)* — "the earth was formed out of water and by water."	**Deut 32:10–11**, **Job 6:18**, **Isa 34:11**, Isa 45:18, **Ps 104:6**, **Prov 8:24, 27–28**, **Gen 8:1**, **Exod 14:21**, **Ezek 1:4**, **Exod 31:1–5**, **Ps 104:30**, Mark 1:10, Rom 8:20–22, Rev 21:1
1:3–5 Let there be light… He separated the light from the darkness	**Hebrew:** Ps 33:6, 9 *(echo)* — "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made… For He spoke, and it came to be." **Apocrypha:** Jdt 16:14 *(echo)* — "you spoke, and they were made." **NT:** 2 Cor 4:6 *(quotation)* — "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made His light shine in our hearts."	**Ps 104:2**, **Ps 19:1–6**, **27:1**, **97:11**, **Isa 9:2**, **Ps 56:13**, **Prov 6:23**, **Ps 139:12**, **Ps 74:16**, **Lev 10:10**, **20:24–26**, Isa 45:7, 60:19–20, John 1:4–9, 8:12, 1 Pet 2:9, 1 John 1:5, Rev 22:5
1:6–8 Let there be an expanse… God called the expanse "sky"	**Hebrew:** Ps 104:2–3 *(echo)* — "He stretches out the heavens like a tent, laying the beams of His chambers in the waters above." **Apocrypha:** Sir 43:1 *(allusion)* — "The pride of the height is the firmament in its clearness." **NT:** Rev 4:6 *(allusion)* — "something like a sea of glass, as clear as crystal" before the throne.	**Job 37:18**, **Exod 39:3**, Ps 19:1, Ps 148:4, Isa 40:22, Ezek 1:22–26, Gen 7:11, Prov 8:27–28, Dan 12:3, 2 Pet 3:5
1:9–10 Let the waters… be gathered… so that the dry land may appear	**Hebrew:** Jer 5:22 *(echo)* — God "set the sand as the boundary for the sea, an enduring barrier it cannot cross." **Apocrypha:** Prayer of Manasseh 3 *(echo)* — God, "who have bound the sea by the word of your commandment; who have shut up the deep." **NT:** Mark 4:39–41 *(allusion)* — "even the wind and the sea obey Him."	Job 38:8–11, Ps 24:1–2, 33:7, 104:6–9, Prov 8:29, Exod 14:21–22, Jonah 1:9, Matt 14:25–33, Rev 21:1

GENESIS	THREE KEY ECHOES	MORE TO READ
1:11–12 Let the earth bring forth… according to its kind	**Hebrew:** Ps 104:14 *(echo)* — "He makes the grass grow… bringing forth food from the earth." **Apocrypha:** 2 Esd 6:44 *(retelling)* — "immediately there came forth great and innumerable fruit… and this was done the third day." **NT:** 1 Cor 15:38 *(allusion)* — "to each kind of seed He gives its own body."	**Lev 19:19**, **Deut 22:9–11**, Ps 65:9–13, Isa 61:11, Matt 7:16–20, Mark 4:26–29, Gal 6:7, Jas 3:12
1:14–19 lights… signs to mark the seasons… And He made the stars as well	**Hebrew:** Jer 10:2 *(allusion)* — "Do not… be terrified by the signs in the heavens." **Apocrypha:** Sir 43:6–7 *(echo)* — "From the moon is the sign of the feast day." **NT:** Jas 1:17 *(allusion)* — "the Father of the heavenly lights, with whom there is no change or shifting shadow."	**Exod 23:15**, **Lev 23:2, 4**, **Ezek 32:8**, **Ps 74:16**, Deut 4:19, 2 Kgs 23:5, Ps 104:19, Ps 136:7–9, Isa 47:13, Wis 13:1–5, Acts 14:15–17, Rom 1:20–25, Gal 4:10, Rev 21:23
1:20–23 great sea creatures… Be fruitful and multiply	**Hebrew:** Ps 74:13–14 *(allusion)* — God "smashed the heads of the dragons of the sea" and "crushed the heads of Leviathan." **Apocrypha:** 2 Esd 6:49–52 *(retelling)* — God preserved "two living creatures," Behemoth and Leviathan. **NT:** Matt 6:26 *(allusion)* — "Look at the birds of the air… your heavenly Father feeds them."	**Job 3:8**, **Isa 27:1**, **Ps 74:13–17**, Ps 104:25–26, Job 40–41, Ps 148:7, Isa 51:9, Jonah 1:17, Rev 13:1
1:26 Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness	**Hebrew:** Ps 8:4–5 *(echo)* — "What is man that You are mindful of him… You made him a little lower than the angels." **Apocrypha:** Wis 2:23 *(echo)* — God "made him an image of his own proper being." **NT:** Col 1:15 *(allusion)* — "The Son is the image of the invisible God."	**Gen 3:22**, **11:7**, **Isa 6:8**, **1 Kgs 22:19–22**, **Job 1:6**, Gen 5:1–3, 9:6, Sir 17:3, 2 Cor 4:4, Heb 1:3, Jas 3:9
1:27 male and female He created them	**Hebrew:** Gen 5:1–2 *(echo)* — "Male and female He created them, and He blessed them." **Apocrypha:** Tob 8:6 *(allusion)* — "You made Adam, and gave him Eve his wife for a helper and support." **NT:** Matt 19:4 *(quotation)* — "from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female.'"	Mark 10:6, Sir 17:1, 1 Cor 11:7–12, Gal 3:28, Eph 4:24, Col 3:10, 1 Pet 3:7
1:28 Be fruitful… subdue it; rule over	**Hebrew:** Exod 1:7 *(echo)* — "the Israelites were fruitful and increased rapidly; they multiplied." **Apocrypha:** Wis 9:2–3 *(echo)* — God formed man "that he should have dominion over the creatures that were made by you." **NT:** Heb 2:6–9 *(quotation via Ps 8)* — "[You] placed everything under his feet… But we see Jesus."	**Ps 72**, Ps 8:6–8, Gen 9:1–7, 12:2–3, 17:6, 35:11, Ps 115:16, Jer 23:3, Sir 17:2–4, Acts 6:7, 1 Cor 15:25–27, Rev 5:10
1:29–30 I have given you every seed-bearing plant… for food	**Hebrew:** Ps 104:27–28 *(echo)* — "All creatures look to You to give them their food in due season." **Apocrypha:** Sir 39:26 *(allusion)* — "the chief of all things necessary for the life of man." **NT:** Acts 14:17 *(allusion)* — God "gives you rain from heaven… filling your hearts with food and gladness."	Gen 9:3, Ps 136:25, 145:15–16, Isa 11:6–9, 65:25, Matt 6:25–33, 1 Tim 4:3–5

GENESIS	THREE KEY ECHOES	MORE TO READ
1:31 indeed, it was very good	**Hebrew:** Ps 104:24 *(echo)* — "How many are Your works, O LORD! In wisdom You have made them all." **Apocrypha:** Sir 39:16 *(echo)* — "All the works of the Lord are exceeding good." **NT:** 1 Tim 4:4 *(allusion)* — "every creation of God is good."	**Ps 100:5**, **Ps 104:19–26**, **Pss 8, 136, 148**, **Job 38**, Eccl 3:11, Ps 145:9, Wis 1:14, Sir 39:33, Rom 8:19–22, Rev 4:11
2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed	**Hebrew:** Exod 39:32 *(echo)* — "So all the work for the tabernacle… was completed." **Apocrypha:** Sir 16:26–27 *(allusion)* — God "garnished his works forever." **NT:** Heb 4:3 *(allusion)* — "His works have been finished since the foundation of the world."	Exod 40:33–34, 1 Kgs 7:51, Neh 9:6, Isa 40:26, John 4:34, 17:4, 19:30, Rev 16:17, 21:6
2:2–3 He rested… God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it	**Hebrew:** Exod 20:11 *(quotation)* — "in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth… but on the seventh day He rested." **Apocrypha:** 2 Macc 15:2–4 *(allusion)* — the day "which he that sees all things has honored and hallowed above other days." **NT:** Heb 4:4, 9–10 *(quotation)* — "on the seventh day God rested from all His works."	Exod 16:22–30, 31:12–17, Deut 5:12–15, Lev 23:3, 25:1–12, Ps 95:11, 132:8, 14, Isa 56:2–7, 58:13–14, 66:1, 1 Macc 2:32–41, Matt 11:28–12:8, Mark 2:27–28, Luke 4:16–21, John 5:17, Col 2:16–17, Rev 14:13

Apocrypha quotations are from the World English Bible (WEB), since the BSB does not include these books; 2 Esdras is also called 4 Ezra. Some versions number Sirach and the Prayer of Manasseh differently.

SECTION 9

Wrap-up

Key questions

1. If Genesis 1 was never meant to answer how the universe formed, why have Christians fought so hard over that question, and what has that fight cost us?
2. Genesis 1:2 never says where the dark waters came from. Does it bother you that the Bible leaves that open? Why or why not?
3. Israel's neighbors said humans were made to be slaves who feed the gods. In what ways do people still live as if they were made only to work?
4. If every person, male and female, is God's royal image, whom do you find it hardest to see that way, and what would change if you did?
5. The sun, moon, and sea were gods to Israel's neighbors, and Genesis demotes them to lamps and water. What are the "gods" of our culture, and how would Genesis 1 demote them?
6. God calls creation "very good" while it still needs to be ordered and subdued. Can something be very good and still unfinished? What does that say about you?
7. The first thing God makes holy is not a place or a person but a day. What does it say about God that he sanctifies time?
8. Israel's failure to rest the land is named as a reason for the exile. What might our own refusal to rest reveal about whom we really trust?
9. Jeremiah and Jesus describe judgment as creation running backward. If sin unmakes the world, what does it look like for God's word to remake your corner of it?
10. Genesis 1 told a captive people that their God, not the empire's, rules the world. Where do you need to hear that today?

This week

☐ Read Genesis 1:1–2:3 again, slowly, out loud.

☐ Pick one row of the echo chart and read every passage in column 3.

☐ Take one Sabbath-style pause this week and note how it feels to trust God with the unfinished work.

Next session: Genesis 2:4–25

Read it before we meet and watch for:

- *'adam* (human) and *'adamah* (ground) — the "earthling" made from the earth (Provan, 2015, p. 68)
- "to cultivate and keep it" (2:15) — the same verbs used of priests in the tabernacle (Num 3:7–8; Provan, 2015, p. 66)
- *'ezer kenegdo*, "a suitable helper" (2:18) — a word used most often of God himself (Provan, 2015, p. 77)

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