

GENESIS – DAY 1

“Seven Days of Creation” Sunday School Class taught by John Stewart

(NRSV)

1 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God 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.

Some “authorities” or sources of insight on Genesis Chapter 1:

St. Augustine. *The City of God*. (4th Century church father)

Rashi (Rabbi Solomon, 11th Century French rabbi)

Abraham Ibn-Ezra (11th Century Spanish rabbi)

St. Thomas Aquinas (13th Century Italian priest)

Ramban (Rabbi Moses, 13th Century Spanish rabbi)

John Milton. *“Paradise Lost”* (17th Century English poet)

Pastor Bill Irons

Samson Hirsch (19th Century German rabbi)

Claus Westermann. *Genesis (Continental Commentary)*

Robert Alter. *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*.

Plano Library. Ebsco Host.

W. Gunther Platt. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*.

[peer-reviewed journals: Science, Nature, National Geographic, Scientific American]

William H. Propp. *Exodus*. (Anchor Bible)

Things to keep in mind when studying

1. Consider the difference between devotional readings of the Bible (spiritual) and more analytical readings (literary, grammatical, cultural, etc.)
2. We will read the creation account “as written.” Modern scholars hold that the Torah was compiled/edited during the Babylonian captivity (597 – 538 BC).

3. Our authorities are Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. Each tradition brings a different, and valuable, perspective to Bible study.
4. When you quote from an English translation of the Bible, state which translation.
5. These statements require serious consideration: “If the Bible says it, it must be true,” and “How can I believe X in the Bible if I don’t believe Y in the Bible?” If, on second thought, you say “Hmm, I’m going to think about that,” you are making progress!!!
6. Jewish tradition holds God dictated the Torah verbatim to Moses on Mount Sinai. The wording, spelling, vowel marks are all divinely inspired.
7. Modern scholars generally hold there are two separate creation accounts in Genesis. They are side by side as a result of the editing process.
8. Traditional Jewish commentators hold that separate/duplicate stories are not a result of editing decisions, but that each adds perspective to the same story.
9. If you are projecting Christian theology onto the OT, say so.
10. Scholars usually call the OT the Hebrew Bible.
11. Your and my personal opinions have value, but we need to look within ourselves and determine whether those opinions have equal value to thinkers, philosophers, scholars, or scientists who might have God-given insight and understanding that we don’t have. If you are stating your personal opinion, say so.
12. One goal of this class is to get us thinking. If your teacher has all the answers, find another teacher!

13. John’s opinion +  = 

14. Your observations are welcome. Don’t be surprised if you are asked “Where does it say that?” Feel free to ask the teacher the same question.
15. There are four levels of traditional Jewish Biblical interpretation, analogous to Christian interpretation. These are: Pshat (plain meaning); Remez (allegorical, sermon level); Drash (comparative, look at similar occurrences); Sod (mystical, revelation)
16. How do you know if a source is reliable? Some considerations
 - has it stood the test of time?
 - educational training and books and articles published
 - has a book review
 - What publisher or periodical?
 - Not on TV or Radio

QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

1. What is the most important event in the Hebrew Bible?
2. What is the most important event in the New Testament?
3. If you met a native American who explained her tribe's creation story, how would you respond?
4. When was the Bible divided into chapters and verses?
5. What ten things did God create on day 1?
6. What Hebrew word is translated "God" in the first creation story? What word is used in the second creation story?
7. The Daily Double: Amazing Grace can be sung to the tune of what TV theme song?
8. If the Hebrew Bible is the story of God's relationship with one small nomadic tribe, why does it start with the creation of the universe?
9. What does Rashi propose might have been the beginning of the HB?
10. Sketch the "world" that was the basis of ancient Hebrew cosmology.
11. Why did St. Augustine hold it was a sin to ask what God was doing before He created the world?
12. After Day 1, was anything else created.... or simply rearranged?
13. Why did God have to separate the light from the darkness? What condition were they in originally?
14. How long were the days? Conservative and Liberal scholars generally hold they were 24-hour days. After all, we still have Day 7, the Sabbath!
15. Were the days created, too?
16. Was God alone on day 1?
17. The Documentary Hypothesis interpretation of the Torah authorship, which author wrote Genesis 1?
18. Was there time before God began his creation process? (note 'In the beginning')
19. Aquinas held that four things were created at the very beginning: Heaven (as the dwelling place of the Saints), the Angels, unformed matter, and time. How, in this reading, might he have come to that conclusion?
20. Why is the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic often referred to by modern scholars in studies of the biblical creation account?
21. If God was coming to your home for lunch, would you serve pork?