

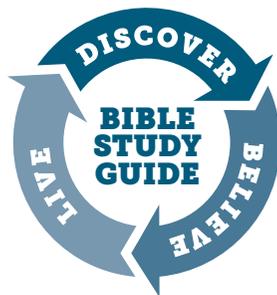
connect 360

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Power &
Purpose
God Unveils the
Universe

A STUDY OF
Genesis 1–11

Vivian Conrad
Ronnie & Renate Hood
Don Raney
Patrick Wilson



 **BaptistWayPress**
Dallas, Texas

*Power & Purpose: God Unveils the Universe (A Study of Genesis 1–11)—
Connect 360 Bible Study Guide*

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Director, Great Commission Team: Delvin Atchison
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How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all of the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

- A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on pages 9–10 and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
 - If all of your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
 - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” menu.
 - Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.
- B. Get a copy of the *Teaching Guide*, a companion piece to this *Study Guide*. The *Teaching Guide* contains additional Bible comments plus two teaching plans. The teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide* are intended to provide practical, easy-to-use teaching suggestions that will work in your class.
- C. After you’ve studied the Bible passage, the lesson comments, and other material, use the teaching suggestions in the *Teaching Guide* to help you develop your plan for leading your class in studying each lesson.
- D. Teaching resource items for use as handouts are available free at www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
- E. Additional Bible study comments on the lessons are available online. Call 1–866–249–1799 or e-mail baptistway@texasbaptists.org to order the *Premium Commentary*. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website, www.baptistwaypress.org. The price of these comments for the entire study is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Commentary* free. Call 1–866–249–1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org to purchase or for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

- F. Additional teaching plans are also available in electronic format (PDF) by calling 1-866-249-1799. The price of these additional teaching plans for the entire study is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Teaching Plans* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.
- G. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

Do you use a Kindle?

This Connect 360 *Bible Study Guide*, along with several other studies, is available in a Kindle edition. The easiest way to find these materials is to search for "BaptistWay" on your Kindle, or go to www.amazon.com/kindle and do a search for "BaptistWay." The Kindle edition can be studied not only on a Kindle but also on your smartphone or tablet using the Kindle app available free from amazon.com/kindle.

Writers for This Study Guide

Patrick Wilson wrote **lessons one through four** in this *Study Guide* and the accompanying teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide*. Patrick serves as the pastor of Westoak Woods Baptist Church in Austin, Texas. Dr. Wilson is a graduate of Baylor University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.A.Th. and Th.M.), and Logsdon Seminary (D.Min.). In addition to pastoring, he has taught seminary courses in Old Testament, Hebrew, and pastoral ministry. He lives in Buda, Texas, with his wife Michelle and their son, Joel.

Vivian Conrad wrote **lessons five through seven and the Easter lesson** in this *Study Guide* and the accompanying teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide*. Since returning to the United States after twenty-four years as missionaries in Asia, Vivian and her husband John have served as staff musicians at Clear Fork Baptist Church in Weatherford, Texas. Vivian is the director of community ministries for Parker Baptist Association in Texas. She is a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.A.Th.) and Dallas Baptist University (B.A. Christian Education). A mother of five, she and John enjoy eleven grandchildren.

Don Raney wrote **lessons eight through ten**. Dr. Raney is an adjunct professor at Wayland Baptist University and has also taught for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Texas Christian University, Mid-America Christian University, and Logsdon Seminary. He has served as pastor of Westlake Chapel in Graham, Texas and First Baptist Church in Petersburg, Texas. He is a graduate of the University of Alabama (B.A.) and received his Ph.D. in Old Testament from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Ronnie & Renate Hood wrote **lessons eleven through thirteen** in this *Study Guide* and the accompanying teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide*. Dr. Ronnie W. Hood II is senior pastor of Canyon Creek Baptist Church, Temple,

Texas. He is a graduate of Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama. Dr. Renate Viveen Hood is professor of Christian Studies (New Testament and Greek) at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Belton, Texas. She earned medical science degrees in the Netherlands. The Hoods studied at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where Ronnie earned M.Div., Th.M., and Ph.D. (Church History) degrees, and Renate earned M.Div. and Ph.D. (Biblical Studies and Greek) degrees.

Power & Purpose: God Unveils the Universe

A Study of Genesis 1–11

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Introducing

POWER & PURPOSE: God Unveils the Universe

A STUDY OF GENESIS 1–11

Approaching This Study of Genesis 1–11

In the beginning . . . God! From the very first words of the Bible we learn that it is a book about God. The Bible is a book about who God is and what God has done. He is a God who has revealed himself as the Creator of the universe whose powerful words brought forth everything that has ever been created.

In the first eleven chapters of Genesis we see history on a universal scale. We learn about the beginnings of the earth, the plants and animals, and the crowning achievement of God's creation: human beings. We also discover how sin enters the world and the devastating effects it has on everything and everyone God created. Fortunately, we also recognize God purposely reaching out to fallen humanity to provide a path to redemption through his covenantal love.

More on Genesis

In many ways Genesis 1–11 serves as an introduction to the rest of Genesis, the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), and all of the Old Testament.

The foundational information it provides includes a theological focus on God's sovereignty and purpose. The major themes of Genesis 1–11 include:

Creation: God is the sovereign Creator who spoke the universe into existence out of nothing. He did not reshape existing material but created all that exists by his powerful word. He is in control of the universe and it reflects both his power and his purpose. He has declared that his creation is good.

Human life: Human life has been created in the image of God and is the crowning achievement of his creative activity. Being created in God's image has bestowed worth and dignity on all human beings. They have been created to live in relationship with God and one another. God also established the family as the foundational community for human life. Humans have been given the responsibility to have authority over the earth and to care for it. Endowed with the power to choose, humans are also sinners who reject God and his ways and bring harm to his creation and to one another. Fortunately, he has provided a way to restore this relationship.

Sin: Sin entered the world at a specific time and place. Sin did not originate with God. Adam and Eve deliberately chose to disobey God which resulted in sin's entrance into the world. The devastating effects of sin were immense and immediate. Fear, shame, blame, and death were some of the disastrous results. From Adam and Eve to Cain and Abel to the time of Noah when, "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5), sin engulfed humanity. No one can escape the lure and effects of sin and it brings both physical and spiritual death.

Covenant: God reveals himself in Genesis 1–11 as a covenant maker and keeper. He establishes a covenant with Noah and his descendants that he will never again destroy the earth with a flood. He also provides a tangible symbol of his covenant (the rainbow) as a

reminder of the promise he has made. Genesis 1–11 also sets the stage for revealing the special covenant relationship God initiates with Abraham as he chooses a people through whom to carry his message and accomplish his purposes.¹

This is the first time *Connect 360* from BaptistWay Press® has focused a study on Genesis 1–11.²

Background on the Book of Genesis

The Hebrew phrase that begins the book (*bereshith*) means “in the beginning.” This is an appropriate title because the Book of Genesis is a book about beginnings of various kinds. Moses is generally accepted as the author of Genesis (as well as all the books of the Pentateuch), though the book itself provides no information regarding its author. Chapters 1–11 of Genesis cover the primeval history of the world—showing that all of the people of the world descended from one couple and became sinners, while the rest of the book contains the history of the patriarchs, focusing on Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Genesis is a narrative that reveals God as the true hero of the Bible. Although humankind rejected God and his original plan, he lovingly provided coverings for them, and through his covenantal love created a path to reconcile them to himself.

Genesis 1–11 in Our Day

How should Genesis 1–11 impact Jesus’ followers today? Here are a few ideas:

- A study of Genesis reminds us of God’s creative power and the purpose for our existence. He was, and is in control of the universe, even when we may feel like all control has been lost. He is a God who brings order out of chaos.

- As we study the creation of human life we must be reminded of the dignity and worth of every person, noting that everyone has been created in God's image. Such knowledge must also guide our view and practice regarding beginning of life and end of life issues.
- This study will instruct us on how sin entered the world, the process of temptation and its ravaging effects on all creation. Sin (as always) is the catalytic force for the evil we see and experience in the world. The question is, will we take action to combat it in our lives and the lives of others through surrender to Jesus?
- In a world where trust is hard to find, this study reminds us that God is a covenant maker and a promise keeper. We can trust him with our lives. We can fully rely on him and we must become people who respond in obedient faith to his instructions.

Our prayer is that this study of Genesis 1–11 will awaken us all to the power and purpose of God as revealed in his creative acts and his covenantal love.

Note: Since the time of the first release of these materials includes the Easter holiday, an Easter lesson is included to meet the needs of churches who wish to have an emphasis on Easter at this time.

POWER & PURPOSE: GOD UNVEILS THE UNIVERSE
(A STUDY OF GENESIS 1–11)

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| Lesson 9 | The Flood: God's Judgment and Renewal | Genesis 7:1–4, 17–24; 8:1–5, 13–16, 20–22 |
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| Lesson 13 | God Sets the Stage for His Chosen People | Genesis 11:10–32 |
| Easter Lesson | A Heartwarming Conversation | Luke 24:1–6a, 13–35 |

Additional Resources for Studying Genesis 1–11³

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Notes

1. Introduction to Genesis, HCSB Study Bible (Nashville: Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), 2–3.
2. See www.baptistwaypress.org for a complete listing of our studies.
3. Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writers or BAPTISTWAY PRESS® with all of its comments.

lesson 1

Creation by God's Word: Forming

MAIN IDEA

God revealed his power as he created the universe and formed the earth.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What does the Creation account reveal about God's power?

STUDY AIM

To contemplate the power of God's spoken word

QUICK READ

God is all-powerful, and he channels his power toward us for our good. We take comfort in knowing the creation of the universe and the forming of the earth reveal his limitless power.



Introduction

If you enjoy cooking, consider one of your specialties. Creating that recipe involves multiple steps. You carefully choose the ingredients and calculate the amount necessary for each one. You gather the ingredients and then set aside time to blend them together, cook the dish, and finish the preparation to serve it to your family or guests. A lot of time and attention goes into successfully creating a recipe that becomes a culinary masterpiece.

There is a distinctive difference between what God did in the opening chapter of Genesis and what we do whenever we create something. When we cook, we take existing ingredients and reformulate them into something new. However, when God created the universe, he did so from nothing. In 1215 A.D. at the fourth Lateran Council, the church used the Latin phrase *creatio ex nihilo* (literally “creation from nothing”) to describe God’s creative power, which means God created the universe without prior ingredients.

God is the first cause of the universe. That is why our passage this week begins with the phrase, “In the beginning God . . .” He existed before all things, and he will never cease to exist. Just as a chef exists outside of his or her created dish, so God exists outside the universe and the limitations within his creation. Time and space do not bind God. His life and his power are limitless.

The Book of Genesis originated in a time when God called the Hebrew people to be a light to the nations. They were to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant by being a blessing to the world and pointing others to the true God (Genesis 12:3). Hence, Genesis served as a polemic to the neighboring nations of Israel that Yahweh was the one and only true God (Deuteronomy 6:4), who was powerful enough to create the universe and form the earth. There is no man-made god like our God!¹

Genesis 1:1–13

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 an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." **7** So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so.

8 God called the expanse "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.

The Creative Power of God (1:1–2)

Before the earth took form or contained life, God reigned. Throughout the Creation account, God's reign is eternal—past, present, and future. While water (and the chemicals that make up water) pre-existed the formation of the earth, the introductory statement of verse one implies that such elements did not exist "in the beginning." God alone existed in the beginning. He is wholly responsible for the creation of all elements of the earth and the heavenly realms. God's creative power generated all matter necessary for the creation of the earth.

God's creativity did not end with the formation of the earth. According to verse two, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters," which means God was at work, moving to accomplish his divine plan.

He continues to move today, just as he did in creation. God rules over his creation, and he has never abdicated his throne. His control over the universe is eternal—past, present, and future. His movement in our lives does not confine him to a human perspective. His providential point of view transcends our circumstances. He knows what we need more than we do because he has a far better perspective on the affairs of our lives. We can take comfort knowing the same God at work in the Creation continues to move over the aspects of our world today. God reigns supreme!

God Created Light (1:3–5)

Light is the first element created from the spoken word of God. God did not labor when he created the universe as we do in recreating objects today. He simply spoke, and the created elements responded in obedient accord. This action and reaction established the obedience precedence we are to emulate as God-followers. Just as the elements of earth formed at God's command, we, the pinnacle of his creation, are to respond in unquestionable obedience. God's word is the final and decisive voice to us. We are to obey our Creator.

Throughout the biblical text, light serves as a symbol of God, his holiness, and his people when they are walking in fellowship with him. While some might view the formation of light depicted in this passage from a literal point of view, it is not until the fourth day of Creation that the celestial lights (i.e., sun and stars) form. Thus, a more symbolic reading of the imagery of light seems more plausible for Genesis 1:3–5. Therefore, light,

Definition of a "Polemic"

Many ancient Near Eastern societies boasted Creation stories. The biblical account served as a polemic against these mythological accounts. A *polemic* is a defense given verbally or in writing to dispel falsehood and emphasize truth. Thus, the Hebrews wrote down their oral traditions of how Yahweh, the one true God, created the heavens and the earth. The Genesis (origin) account then served to combat the false Creation stories of other nations and to point humanity to believe in Yahweh.

as described in verse three, speaks more of the moral purity, wisdom, and righteousness that flow from the nature of God, which he infused into his creation. Hence, before he created any physical objects, God defined *good* (see Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25). Light, God's goodness, became the ultimate standard by which God daily evaluated his creative work, and it is the mark to which we aspire as his children.

God Created Sky and Sea (1:6–8)

On the second day of Creation, God separated the waters into two bodies. He used some of the moisture to cultivate a protective layer he called “sky.” In Hebrew understanding, this sky became the first layer of the heavens. God used the rest of the water to form the oceans, seas, lakes, ponds, rivers, and creeks on the land as he continued his creative speech on the third day.

God was intentional in the substance and sequence of creation. Before he created anything to dwell in the sky, he developed the environment where the birds would dwell. He continued to use his creative power in this way, building the seas before creating fish and water mammals, and land before forming animals and humans. God is a God of order and intentionality. As we continue through life, great peace, comfort, and contentment arise when we recognize God remains on his throne and continues to create what is needed for each circumstance of life. God has purpose in all that he does, and he works with intentionality. We may not always perceive God's design, but every word is for our good and the advancement of his kingdom.

God Created Land (1:9–13)

By gathering waters together to form the various bodies of water in the world, God strategically created dry ground. Continuing to create the perfect climate for humanity, God then cultivated vegetation. Seed-bearing fruit trees and plants began to bud and to grow. Just as light symbolizes God's goodness and purity, plants symbolize growth and life. The “tree of life” described in Genesis 2:9 represents God's life-giving power.

The Babylonian Creation Account

Perhaps the most notable extra-biblical Creation account is the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish*. According to the Babylonians, Ea was the cleverest and most powerful of the gods. He fathered Marduk, the god of the storm. When Ea angered Tiamat, the goddess of the oceans, his son, Marduk, came to his aid. Overcoming Tiamat's army of magical dragons and monsters, the warrior god captured Tiamat in his net, held her mouth open with a strong wind, and shot an arrow down her throat to slay her. Finally, Marduk took his club and split the water-goddess into two. He placed one-half of the water in the sky, making the heavens. From the other half, he formed land, adding the fresh waters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which the Babylonians depended on for vegetation and life.

In contrast to the violence of *Enuma Elish*, the Genesis account speaks of a God who created out of purpose and peace. While both stories explain a separation of waters to form the sky and the land, Genesis points only to Yahweh as the eternal sovereign power. The Lord's power comes not by warfare or by magic. God's power is constant and stems from his nature. He remains unchallenged, and his reign is supreme. Creation serves as a constant reminder that there is nothing our God cannot do (Luke 1:37).

The initial growth of seed-bearing plants occurred before the establishment of the sun and stars. Therefore, the divine light of the first day of Creation supported the growth of all the plant life created on day three. God is the giver of life, both physically and spiritually. We find abundant, purposeful life only through an intimate relationship with him (John 10:10).

The forthcoming banishment of Adam and Eve from the garden and their access to the tree of life (Gen. 3), illustrates the physical and spiritual death that occurs with the breach between God and humanity through sin. However, God did not doom humankind to eternal death. Instead, through Christ, he reestablished a path for humanity to return to the Garden of Eden and the tree of life. The Bible reemphasizes this point in Revelation 22, describing creation as a heavenly world illuminated by God's presence alone.

Our growth as Christians only occurs through God's power at work in us. Just as he created the plants and trees, he creates us to grow and bear fruit (John 15:1–8). Cultivating the fruit of the Spirit occurs as we embrace God and his power to transform us into his image (Galatians 5:22–23). Apart from perpetual growth by the power of God, our lives churn in an endless cycle of mundane events, void of real significance and eternal impact. However, when we are rooted in Christ, the light of God blooms in us, yielding fruitful lives.

Implications and Actions

Our God is all-powerful. He spoke creation into existence. From the depths of the ocean to the far reaches of the universe, God's power radiates. He continues his creative work in each of us. He reigns over the events of our lives and remains sovereign over the earth and the heavens he created. His power is available to us as we walk in the light of his truth and grow in his image. We may not fully understand God and all of his ways, but he intentionally works to cultivate the daily aspects of our lives just as he did in the opening days of Creation. As we follow him, we experience the illumination of our

The Meaning of "Day" in Genesis 1

Most English lexicons translate the Hebrew word, *yom* as "day." Some Bible scholars suggest this term speaks of a literal twenty-four-hour period. This view, supported by the root source of *yom*, meaning, "to be hot," espouses that the reference to evening and morning suggests a literal night and day. Other biblical experts view the use of "day" as a more general reference to time. Proponents of this view emphasize God did not create the sun and moon until the fourth day, so the present means of measuring time did not exist in the first usages of the term.

Regardless of how one interprets the idea of the days of Creation, the intent of the Genesis text is to point to the Creator, who remains beyond our full comprehension. Stop and consider the benefits and challenges associated with both views.

6. In this passage, God laid the foundation for the creation of life, and ultimately humanity. How did God make preparations in your life for something that he later developed (i.e., marriage, kids, job, ministry opportunity, etc.)?

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–7 are from the New International Version (1984 edition).