

September 2

Lesson 1 (NIV)

# GOD CREATES HEAVENS AND EARTH

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Psalm 33:1–9](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Genesis 1:1–13](#)

## GENESIS 1:1–13

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. <sup>4</sup>God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

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

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

<sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

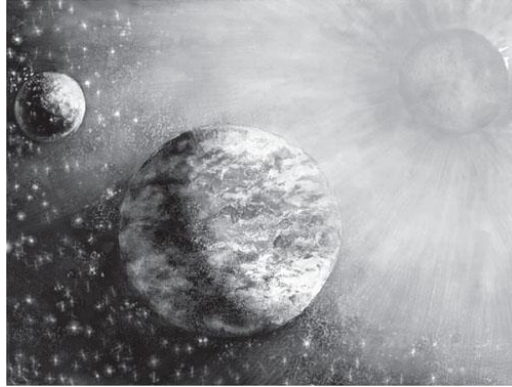


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## KEY VERSES

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 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.—[Genesis 1:1, 2](#)*

# GOD'S WORLD AND GOD'S PEOPLE

## Unit 1: God Creates the World

LESSONS [1–5](#)

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List what was created on each of the first three days in [Genesis 1](#).
2. Explain the meaning of the *vault*.
3. Write a prayer praising God for who he is and for his works of creation.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### [Introduction](#)

A. [Many, One, or None?](#)

B. [Lesson Context](#)

I. [The Big Picture \(GENESIS 1:1, 2\)](#)

A. [Attribution \(v. 1\)](#)

[The Wonder of It All](#)

[B. The Earth in the Universe \(v. 2\)](#)

[II. Day One \(GENESIS 1:3–5\)](#)

[A. Creating Light \(v. 3\)](#)

[B. Separating Light from Darkness \(v. 4\)](#)

[C. Naming Light and Darkness \(v. 5\)](#)

[\*Light for the World\*](#)

[III. Day Two \(GENESIS 1:6–8\)](#)

[A. Creating the Vault \(v. 6a\)](#)

[B. Separating the Water \(vv. 6b, 7\)](#)

[C. Naming the Vault \(v. 8\)](#)

[IV. Day Three \(GENESIS 1:9–13\)](#)

[A. Gathering the Water \(v. 9\)](#)

[B. Naming Land and Seas \(v. 10\)](#)

[C. Establishing Vegetation \(vv. 11–13\)](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[A. The Game Maker](#)

[B. Prayer](#)

[C. Thought to Remember](#)

## HOW TO SAY IT

Canaan *Kay-nun*.

cosmology *koz-mol-uh-jee*.

Galileo *Gah-luh-lee-oh*.

Mesopotamia *Mes-uh-puh-tay-me-uh*.

phenomenologically *fih-naw-meh-nuh-law-jih-kuh-lee*.

polytheism *paw-lee-thee-ih-zum*.

Taj Mahal *Tawzh Meh-haul*.

Zephaniah *Zef-uh-nye-uh*.

## Introduction

### A. Many, One, or None?

Ironically, polytheism (belief in many gods) and atheism (denial of any god) both seem to be growing in popularity in Western democracies. Neither viewpoint is new. Scholars have identified more than 2,000 named deities in the ancient Near East, the region of biblical events. As for atheism, the psalmist from centuries ago wrote, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’ ” ([Psalm 14:1](#)).

Polytheism leads to a chaos of competing, fickle gods of equal or shifting strength, and mortals must try to get on the side of the one(s) who will win. One feature of polytheism is the absence of a singular basis of moral absolutes; atheism ends up in the same place. The inevitable results in both cases are moral relativism and the rule of the powerful over the powerless.

[Genesis 1](#) reveals, however, that there is only one true God. Only in the existence of a personal God can there be a designed, absolute standard that governs all human behavior and makes sense of the universe. This great truth forms the doctrinal foundation for the rest of Scripture.

### B. Lesson Context

*Cosmology* refers to one’s concept of the universe. The cosmology of the ancient Near East, which was the historical and cultural context of the Old Testament, was different from popular cosmologies today. Michael S. Heiser has described the ancient cosmology as envisioning three realms: (1) the heavens, the place where the gods are; (2) the earth, the place of humans and other creatures; and (3) the region below the earth. (For a variant that took into account only immediate sense experience, see commentary on [Genesis 1:20](#) in lesson [2](#).)

This three-tier concept was held by the peoples of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Canaan; it was also assumed by the writers of the Old and New Testaments (see [Psalm 33:6–8](#); [Proverbs 8:27–29](#); [Philippians 2:10](#); [Revelation 5:3](#)). This cosmology may be compared with a flat plate that has an upside-down bowl atop it. People and animals lived on the plate underneath the bowl. The arc of sun, moon, and stars across the sky (the surface of the bowl) marked where the gods lived. The depths and supports of the earth were below the plate; the dead were located there as well.

The basis of this cosmology was how the earth appeared in relation to everything else as one stood on the ground, not as one looking at the earth and galaxies from the vantage point of an orbiting space station. For ancient peoples, the mountains seemed to reach up to the heavens and support it ([2 Samuel 22:8](#)). Bars and roots of the mountains formed the lower regions to support the earth and provide depth for the seas ([Jonah 2:5, 6](#)).

Such language is not meant to describe the geology of creation in a scientific way, but rather its appearance. This is no different from our speaking of the sun's "rising" when we've known since childhood that the sun does not actually rise but only appears to do so from our vantage point on the earth. When we speak of the sun's "rising," we are not speaking untruthfully from ignorance; rather, we (and the Bible authors) are speaking phenomenologically.

Skeptics often put Genesis in the same category as ancient Near Eastern myths. But Genesis does not borrow from those myths; the Genesis creation account stands alone, in stark contrast to rival accounts of the ancient world.

## I. The Big Picture

### ([GENESIS 1:1, 2](#))

#### A. Attribution (v. [1](#))

##### [1a. In the beginning](#)

Neither the peoples of the ancient world in general nor the Scriptures in particular assert innumerable beginnings. Only one beginning is in view, and it is that which commences in the first verse of the Bible. The concept of *the beginning* is not limited to a singular point of time, but rather includes the span of events that are described through [Genesis 2:4](#).

##### [1b. God created](#)

The Hebrew word translated *God* is actually plural in form. Some well-meaning believers, knowing that Scripture clearly teaches there is only one true God ([Isaiah 46:9](#); etc.), assert that this plural form demonstrates that God is a trinity. Unbelievers claim that this plural form indicates that the Old Testament teaches the existence of many gods.

Neither view is necessarily supported by this plural form, for two reasons. First, though a plural noun in Hebrew may indicate "more than one," a noun may be plural to signify honor; this is similar to the royal "we" spoken by a king or queen. Second, the Hebrew behind the verb *created* is singular, indicating only one subject. The best explanation is that God is viewed as a single essence who is honored above all other beings.

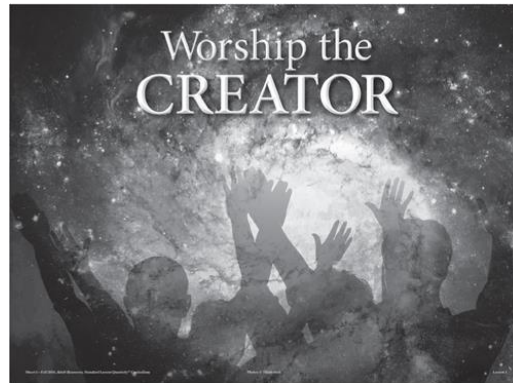
##### [1c. the heavens and the earth.](#)

This expression is roughly equivalent to our term *universe*. In Hebrew, two words with opposite senses are often paired to indicate a totality. For example, "from the least to the greatest" in [2 Chronicles 34:30](#) means all kinds of people. Therefore [Genesis 1:1](#) is expressing quite clearly that all we call "matter" today is not coeternal with God. Rather, God brought it into existence.

## THE WONDER OF IT ALL

The Great Wall of China, Christ the Redeemer Statue in Brazil, and India’s Taj Mahal are prestigious landmarks among the Seven Wonders of the Modern World. Each architectural masterpiece showcases ingenuity and artistic achievements. Yet as we turn to the first page of history, we do not find detailed prototypes, world-class construction engineers, or tireless artisans.

Instead, we encounter nothing—nothing, that is, except God.



Visual for Lesson [1](#). *Point to this visual as you ask, “How would your life be different if you didn’t believe God created the heavens and the earth?”*

Then in a mere five words, the Bible announces one colossal moment: “In the beginning God created.” God’s divine word ordered our world into structured being. He created it to stand firm ([Psalm 33:9](#)) until he commands otherwise. Within the hitherto lifeless void, the all-powerful Creator precisely shaped the heavens and earth.

God did not use a trial and error method to perfect creation. He did not rely on guesswork to create. Rather he relied on his unfathomable wisdom, which the books of Job and Psalms extol ([Job 38; 39; Psalm 104:24](#)).

Given that inanimate creation proclaims God’s glory and wise knowledge ([Psalm 19:1, 2](#)), how much more are we obligated to do so! Each new day invites us to celebrate visibly our loving, majestic maker of the heavens and the earth ([Job 9:8, 9; 38:4–39:30](#); etc.).

—B. L.

### B. The Earth in the Universe (v. [2](#))

#### **[2a](#). Now the earth was formless and empty,**

We move to the description of the situation after the creation of matter in verse [1](#). The exact phrase (in the original Hebrew) of earth’s description *formless and empty* also occurs in [Jeremiah 4:23](#). There it describes the moral chaos of a chosen people who do not know the Lord, who do not know how to do good, and who are wise only in knowing how to do evil. The phrase seems to describe a situation that is without moral boundaries. In parallel, [Genesis 1:2](#) implies that physical boundaries are not yet fully defined (compare [1:4](#)).

### *What Do You Think?*

What are some specific things for which you can praise God as you observe creation?

### *Digging Deeper*

For ideas, skim through [Psalms 1–41](#) to identify passages that include the theme of creation.

#### **2b. darkness was over the surface of the deep,**

Here, the word *darkness* communicates the absence of light in a physical sense. Later writers and Jesus himself will use this word to communicate the absence of light in a moral sense ([Isaiah 9:2](#); [59:9](#); [Matthew 4:16](#); [John 1:5](#); [12:46](#); etc.). It also comes to be used in contexts that call for the punitive acts of God ([Amos 5:20](#); [Zephaniah 1:15](#)).

Regarding [Genesis 1](#), the literal, physical sense is clear. But as we read the Old Testament in light of the New Testament, our understanding of figurative uses of the word *darkness* is enhanced.

#### **2c. and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.**

The word translated *Spirit* is elsewhere translated “breath” ([Genesis 6:17](#)), “wind” ([8:1](#)), “spirit” ([45:27](#)), “courage” ([Joshua 2:11](#)), and others. Regarding a choice between translations of *Spirit* or *spirit*, the translators were faced with a difficulty in that the Hebrew language does not distinguish between uppercase and lowercase letters. So translators must interpret the meaning, and they capitalize when the reference is to God personally as divine being.

As a result, the phrases *Spirit of God* and *spirit of God* occur 13 times and 1 time respectively in the *New International Version* of the Old Testament. Many Christians think the phrase *Spirit of God* always refers to the Holy Spirit. But passages where the identical Hebrew is properly not translated that way are [1 Samuel 16:15](#), [16](#), [23](#); [18:10](#).

The phrase *the Spirit of God* in the passage before us refers to the same one known as “the Spirit of the Lord.” This Spirit can be present ([Judges 11:29](#)), take action ([13:25](#)), speak messages ([2 Samuel 23:2](#)), and depart ([1 Samuel 16:14](#)). These are the qualities of a personal being, not an impersonal force.

## **II. Day One**

### **([GENESIS 1:3–5](#))**

#### **A. Creating Light (v. [3](#))**

#### **[3](#). And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.**

Creation begins! The phrase *And God said* occurs at the beginning of each day of creation, and here it serves to separate [Genesis 1:3](#) and following from [1:1](#), [2](#). *Let there be* is a command or desire for something to take place. Presumably those hearing this command are the inhabitants of Heaven, the abode of God.

### *What Do You Think?*

What steps can you take to be more attentive to what God says?

### ***Digging Deeper***

With reference to [Psalm 19:1–3](#) and [Romans 1:18–20](#), consider how and what God communicates in Scriptures is different from how and what he communicates through creation.

The first thing created is light. Since the sun, moon, and stars are not created until the fourth day, some think that the light referred to here may be what scientists call energy. Perhaps this light-as-energy, if that is what it is, is a new creation out of nothing. Or perhaps matter that God previously created is now turned into energy, a concept absent from the ancient mind. Addressing such an issue is not the aim of the book of Genesis. The stress, rather, is that light stands in positive contrast to darkness (next verse).

## **B. Separating Light from Darkness (v. 4)**

### **4. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.**

God acts in and on his creation, and his light pushes back the darkness. The word *good* describes the value of *the light*. It may also include the excellence of figurative ideas associated with light. The Scripture may be using the acts of creation to teach a spiritual lesson in addition to the material events of creation. If that's the case, then the lesson is that there is a difference between good and evil just as clearly as there is a difference between physical light and darkness. Foolish, sinful humans will later blur those distinctions. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil" ([Isaiah 5:20](#)).

### ***What Do You Think?***

What more can your church do to participate with God in dispelling moral darkness with the light of the gospel?

### ***Digging Deeper***

Using a concordance, find occurrences of the word *light* in the Gospel of John and Epistle of 1 John to inform your answer.

## **C. Naming Light and Darkness (v. 5)**

### **5. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.**

From the perspective of the ancient world, naming brings things into existence; unnamed things do not exist. Modern, scientific ideas about the nature of light are not in view. Just as darkness is merely the absence of light, and light is the creation of God, so also "*day*" and "*night*" are portrayed as impersonal creations rather than as rival gods or the forces used by other gods. In naming *light* and *darkness*, God exercises his authority and power as Creator.



The meaning of *day* has been interpreted in various ways to calculate the age of the earth. The word *day* in some contexts refers to the part of a 24-hour period that has light ([Exodus 13:21](#)). In other contexts it refers to entire 24-hour periods of time ([Genesis 7:10](#)). In still other contexts, *day* refers to a longer period of time ([Genesis 2:4](#), where NIV translates the Hebrew word for *day* as “when”). The proposal that the phrase *there was evening, and there was morning* naturally suggests a 24-hour day is met with the observation that the sun—the rising and setting of which establish evening and morning—is not created until the fourth day.

One commentator has identified 20 creation accounts in the Bible. In so doing, he notes that the main emphasis across these is “the who” of creation—namely God. Secondly, the Bible writers address “the how” of creation. Of least importance to them is “the when.” The goal of the authors is not to describe the age of the earth, but rather to describe the orderliness of creation and the lordship of the Creator over all that exists.

### ***What Do You Think?***

How do we ensure that discussions on the age of the earth promote the gospel?

### ***Digging Deeper***

Inform your answer by researching the differences between the “old earth,” “young earth,” and “ultra-young earth” viewpoints as held by creationists in those camps.

## ***LIGHT FOR THE WORLD***

Galileo (1564–1642) labored to calculate the speed of light, but his experiments fell short. Danish astronomer Olaus Roemer (spelled variously) is credited with successfully measuring the speed of light, in 1676. Today’s scientists calculate that light travels at 186,000 miles per second.

Cosmic gamma rays, quantum gravity, black holes—while humans theorize to probe the origins of the universe, God is already there. He created light and its speed. He knows where every ray of sunlight and moonlight will fall on earth at any given nanosecond (see [Isaiah 38:8](#)).

The psalmist declares that the Lord wraps himself in light ([Psalm 104:2](#)). Jesus announced himself to be “the light of the world” ([John 8:12](#)). Light sustains life, both physical and spiritual. Light is part of God’s essence ([1 John 1:5](#)). God delights in light. Do we? (See [Romans 13:12](#); [1 Peter 2:9](#); [1 John 2:11](#).)

—B. L.

## **III. Day Two**

### **([GENESIS 1:6–8](#))**

#### **A. Creating the Vault (v. [6a](#))**

##### **[6a](#). And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters**

*Vault* refers to the bowl-like dome mentioned in the Lesson Context; see discussion there.

## B. Separating the Water (vv. [6b, 7](#))

**[6b, 7](#). “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.**

Of particular interest here is the vault’s function as a boundary to separate *the water under the vault from the water above it*. Those waters *under the vault* are all the bodies of water on the earth and below the earth (rivers, lakes, oceans, aquifers). *The water above the vault* refers to the clouds from which rain falls.

## C. Naming the Vault (v. [8](#))

**[8](#). God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.**

The word translated sky is used for the air where the birds fly ([Genesis 1:20](#)); the location of sun, moon, and stars ([Deuteronomy 4:19](#)); or the abode of God and other heavenly beings ([1 Kings 22:19](#); compare [2 Corinthians 12:2](#)). In any case, again God asserts his authority by naming. Paul Kissling notes that this serves to oppose the ancient Near East belief that creation of *the vault* is a battle between warring gods. Instead, the Bible depicts the unique Creator God calmly forming everything as he alone wills.

## IV. Day Three

([GENESIS 1:9–13](#))

### A. Gathering the Water (v. [9](#))

**[9](#). And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so.**

The gathering of *the water ... to one place* refers to the seas on the surface of the earth. The result is that landforms appear. Again, the account does not say how, or how quickly, God does this. It simply happens at his command.

### B. Naming Land and Seas (v. [10](#))

**[10](#). God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.**

One of the deities of the ancient world was Yam, a name equivalent to the Hebrew word for *seas*. The verse before us stands in sharp contrast with such a myth as it credits the one, true God as Creator of the seas. The seas are simply inanimate water, neither sentient nor divine.

#### *What Do You Think?*

How would you teach truth about God to someone who believes in a fictitious god or gods?

#### *Digging Deeper*

Consider how Paul's technique in [Acts 17:16–31](#) (which does not use Scripture) should be modified in various modern contexts.

### C. Establishing Vegetation (vv. [11–13](#))

**[11, 12a.](#) 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. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds.**

Various kinds of plant life appear. This continues the preparation of the earth for human habitation, for now there is renewable sustenance of the earth necessary for survival of humans and animals.

The phrase *according to their kinds* is important and remarkable in indicating that watermelon seeds result in watermelons, etc. If we pause to consider the consistency of this, it is remarkable yet today.

**[12b, 13.](#) And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.**

The account of *the third day* concludes with a refrain found throughout the first chapter of Genesis: God approves of what he has created ([1:4, 10, 18, 21, 25, 31](#)).

## Conclusion

### A. The Game Maker

My son-in-law loves to play board games. I am amazed at the creativity of the people who invent the games. The inventor designs the game board, playing pieces, and rules of play. The players are free to choose to ignore the rules, but then they are not playing the game as intended by its creator.

There are really only two viewpoints regarding the ultimate source of all things. In one view, the ultimate source is eternally existing *matter*, the substance of which all things consist. Such a “god” is impersonal—without will or purpose, unable to possess or impose morals. In the other viewpoint, the ultimate source is a *person*. A person has qualities such as self-awareness, will, morality, and the power to act.

The difference is profound. In the universe of an impersonal god, there can be no absolute standard of right and wrong. Humans have no eternal destiny; they do not suffer eternal consequences for behavior. But in the real universe of the personal God, it is he who decides what is right and wrong. The uncreated God of the Bible is the Creator of all that exists, and his creation is obligated to obey him.

The Scriptures tell us about the designer of the universe. Like the game maker, God has sent us instructions of how to live, the rules of right and wrong, and the consequences of breaking the rules. Humankind has been granted freedom to choose whether or not to obey the rules, but humankind has not been given the right to decide what the rules are.

### **B. Prayer**

Dear God, Creator of the universe, we thank you for making yourself known to us. We also thank you for providing Christ, your Son, as our means of becoming a new creation after breaking your rules. Help us to submit to your Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

Praise the Creator!

## **VISUALS** FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page [12](#)) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Fall Quarter. That packet also contains the very useful *Presentation Tools* CD for teacher use. Order No. 1629118 from your supplier.