

THE BIG JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation



Image by NASA

'Earthrise' - Earth above the lunar horizon. This famous image was taken by Apollo 8 crewmember Bill Anders on December 24, 1968, while in orbit around the Moon.

two ► In the Beginning

Introduction and Questions

In this session of the Big Journey we unpack the first two chapters of Genesis. From a dark lifeless ball shrouded in water, God creates our stunningly beautiful world lit by sun and moon, and by the stars and galaxies that stretch for unimaginable distances into space. And He creates mankind to fill it and have dominion over it.

When reading this passage we may be tempted to focus primarily on how it squares with modern scientific theories. For example, we might ask whether the creation days were really just 24 hours long. And what about the theory of evolution?

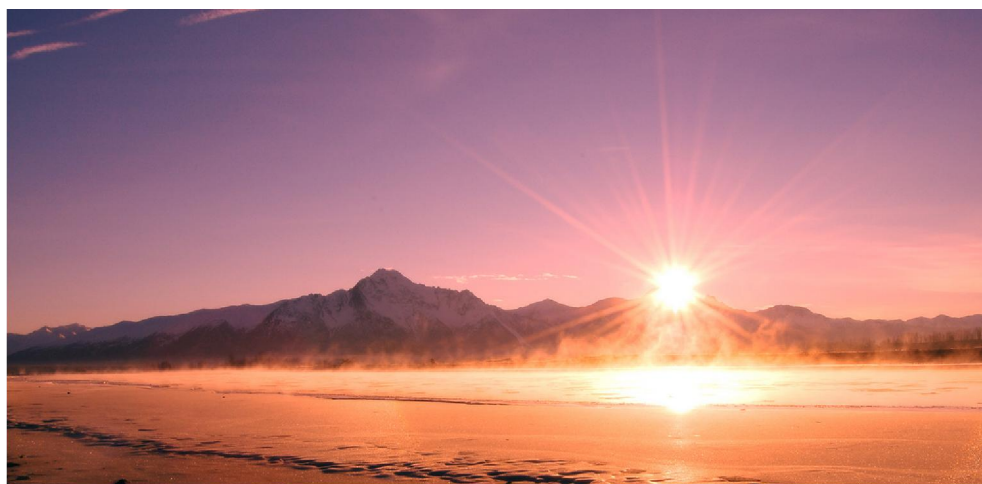
These questions are obviously important. But this passage goes deeper than geology and biology. It tells us about our Creator God. It explains who we humans are, and why God created us. It tells us about our relationship to God, and to this world. It unveils the mystery of the relationship between men and women. These are the things we'll focus on in this and the next session.

In this session we'll look at the creation of this world, and of humans as the crowning glory of God's creation. And we'll ask what Creation tells us about God.

In the next session, entitled 'In God's Image', we'll be focusing on ourselves. What does it mean to be in God's image? Why did God create us male and female? And what did God put us here on Earth to do?

The creation account divides into three parts:

- **Genesis 1.1** The first verse of Genesis tells us that God created everything – both this Universe and the created heavenly realms, too, that we cannot see.
- **Genesis 1.2-2.3** God (so to speak) ‘zooms in’ on this Earth. It’s a dark lifeless ball, and step by step God transforms it into this beautiful world. He does this in six days, and rests on the seventh day. Each of the six creative days begins with God’s creative, powerful words – *“And God said . . .”*.
- **Genesis 2.4-25** God ‘zooms in’ even more closely to a specific region on Earth. He gives us an intimate and more detailed view of how He made mankind and the garden paradise that was to be His home and theirs.

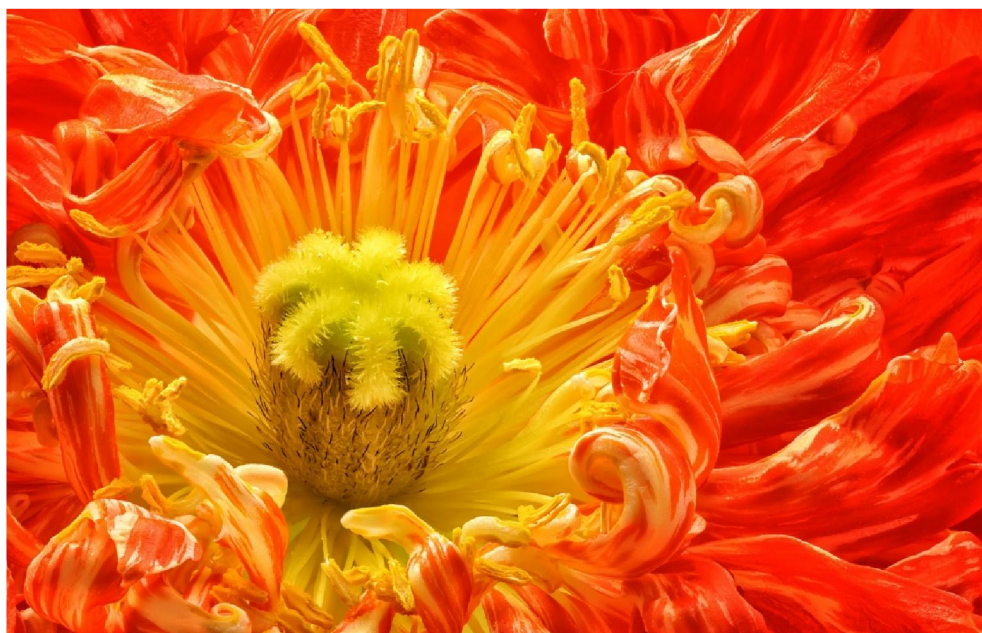


Pioneer Peak Palmer © Cecil Sanders / Cecil Sanders Photography (CC BY 2.0)

A sunlit afternoon by the Matanuska River, Alaska. *“And God made . . . the greater light to rule the day”* (Genesis 1.16).

In the first chapter of Genesis, God uses two words for ‘create’ or ‘make’. One of them is *bara’* (used in verses 1, 21 and 27). This word, as used here, tells us that God is creating something quite new and different. And so this word is pointing out the three distinct orders of God’s creation: (1) **non-conscious things** – sun, moon and stars, and the earth with its vegetation; (2) **conscious life** – the animals (3) **self-conscious life** – mankind.

Before the first creation day, Earth was *“formless and empty”* (NIV). So God gives it **form** - He brings order out of chaos. Then He **fills** it - the land with vegetation, the sky with sun and moon and stars, the air with birds, and the seas and the land with all kinds of living creatures. Finally, He makes man.



Red Hot Poppy © dspindle / Dave Spindle : Flickr (CC BY-NC 2.0)

A poppy in radiant red. Even kings and emperors in all their regal splendour are not arrayed like this exquisite bloom (compare Matthew 6.29).



Ban Gioc–Detian Falls on the border between Vietnam and China. A present day Eden.

God finishes all His creative work, and pronounces it *“very good”*. On the seventh day, He rests. He has ordered its chaos and filled its emptiness. All is now exactly as He wanted it to be. All is in perfect harmony.

In chapter 2 God fills in the details of how He made humans, both male and female. He plants a well-watered paradise in Eden, and there He places Adam.

And notice the change in God’s name here. In Genesis 1.1-2.3, He is called *“God”*, which translates the Hebrew word *‘Elohim*. This word expresses God’s sovereign omnipotence. But in the remainder of chapter 2, from 2.4 onwards, He is called *“the LORD God”*. The word *“God”* here is *‘Elohim*, as before. But now this name is combined with *“LORD”*, which translates the Hebrew word *Yahweh*. This is God’s personal name. It reveals Him as a God Who relates to His people by making covenants with them. The omnipotent sovereign Creator is His people’s faithful covenant Partner.

But Adam is alone, and that is *“not good”*. God brings the animals and birds to Adam, who names them. But Adam still lacks a real companion. So God creates Eve to be *“a helper comparable to him”* (Genesis 2.18 NKJV) - a partner who matched him perfectly.



Newcastle Quayside © FreeFoto.com (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0)

The night skyline of Newcastle Quayside, a recently regenerated area of Newcastle – a testament to our God-given urge to be culture builders.

God gives mankind responsibility. Adam and Eve are called to care for and protect the Garden of Eden. They are to have dominion over the Earth, to *“fill”* it and *“subdue”* it and develop and use its diverse and bountiful resources. Through science, technology and the arts, we are to be *culture-builders*.

Adam and Eve began life in Eden, but as their family grew ever larger, they were to push the garden’s boundaries out to the farthest corners of the Earth. Gregory Beale comments: *“This meant the presence of God which was limited to Eden was to be extended throughout the whole earth.”*



Bohemian Switzerland © Jiri Sebek: Flickr / JiriSebek.com (CC BY-NC 2.0)

Sunrise in Bohemian Switzerland (a national park in the Czech Republic). One day there will be *“a new heaven and a new earth”* (Revelation 21.1) and *“the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord . . .”* (Habakkuk 2.14). This glorious prospect is captured in this morning scene.

Reading and reflecting

Read Genesis 1.1-2.25, Psalms 19.1-6, John 1.1-5, Romans 1.20, Colossians 1.15-17.

- ❗ Creation days 1 to 3 relate closely to days 4 to 6. In what way?
- ❗ Why does the Bible stress that the creation is very good?
- ❗ The description of how God made man is rather different from the description of how He made everything else (see Genesis 1.26-28, 2.7). In what ways? And what does that teach us about ourselves?
- ❗ Why does the name of God change at Genesis 2.4?
- ❗ Why does God plant a garden and what was so special about it?
- ❗ We, too, are new creations (2 Corinthians 5.17, Galatians 6.15). How does the creation account in Genesis 1 reflect our own creation as God’s new people? (2 Corinthians 4.6 is also relevant here.)
- ❗ What does the creation we see about us tell us about God?

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