

Sunday Morning Bible Study

Week 1: Genesis 1:1 – 2:25

Things to Remember:

- Genesis is part of a larger whole
- It is book one of a five-part story
- The word Pentateuch comes from the Greek words penta (five) and teuchos (scroll), and is related to the fact that Genesis through Deuteronomy constitute the first five books (scrolls) of the Bible. These books are also known as the Torah, which is the Hebrew word for law.
- To understand Genesis, you need to understand the story of the Pentateuch
- The center of the story is where God meets Israel on Mount Sinai and gives them instructions on how to be his people. They receive the law which is central to their identity.
- They learn:
 - who they are as God's people and how to maintain a life-giving relationship with God in the Promised Land (summary)
 - God is the creator of the cosmos
 - God redeemed them from Egypt; God is the savior of Israel
 - God gave them the land of Canaan as a home
 - God alone is worthy of their devotion
 - They are God's people and God alone is their God

The Pentateuch came about by oral tradition (stories handed down by word of mouth) until various authors wrote them down and various redactors (editors) pieced them together. The major redactors are known as:

J (Yahwist—the J is from the German Jahwist)

E (Elohist)

D (Deuteronomist)

P (Priestly). The article cited above discusses these in more detail.

Yahwist, the name given to the earliest literary source underlying the books of Genesis–Numbers. The siglum given the source is “J,” which is derived from the German spelling of the name of God, Jahveh (in English usually spelled Yahweh), used throughout this source. The Yahwist source is usually dated around 950 BCE. Among its characteristics are bold anthropomorphisms; positive attitudes toward agricultural civilization, the state, and kingship; a mixture of nationalistic and universalistic concerns; and a style that exudes charm, simplicity, and clarity. The anonymous writer wove together oral and written stories to assist a people in discovering not only the outer history of names and places, but also the inner story of God's work among them. Examples of the Yahwist writing are found in Gen. 2:4b–4:26; 32:22–32; Exod. 1–22; and Num. 24:1–25.

Priestly writer(s), the name given to the author(s) of one of the sources found in the books of Genesis–Numbers. The siglum given the source is “P,” because the authors appear to have come from priestly circles. In Genesis and Exod. 1–24, the Priestly writers appear to have accepted the narrative of Israel's origins as told in the J and E materials; material ascribed to P in this portion of the Pentateuch consists mainly of editorial additions, such as dates and genealogies that tie the material together. A few longer additions explain the origins of such rituals as the sabbath (Gen. 1), the prohibition against eating meat with blood (Gen. 9), and circumcision (Gen. 17). Many scholars also detect signs that there were separate P narratives of the flood and the crossing of the sea. The core of the P material is usually thought to lie in the corpus of laws and regulations found in Exod. 25–Num. 10 (including the whole book of Leviticus). Here, there are instructions about the tabernacle (Exod. 25–31; 35–40), the sacrificial system (Lev. 1–7); the consecration of priests (Lev. 8–10); purity and impurity (Lev. 11–15); the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16); and holiness (Lev. 17–26). The last section is often called the Holiness Code and has received particular attention as a distinct block of P material dealing with behavior that will serve to distinguish Israel from other nations.

Elohist (el'oh-hist), the name given by modern biblical scholars to the author(s) of material that served as one of the sources for what is now found in the books of Genesis–Numbers. The abbreviation used as a siglum for this source or body of tradition is “E.” The designation Elohist (or E) derives from the material’s use of the name Elohim for God. Most scholars believe that the Elohist material was combined with another major tradition called the Yahwistic material (or “J”), which prefers to use the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, as the name for God. Other distinctive features are noted as well. The Elohist prefers to use “Jacob” rather than “Israel,” “Jethro” rather than “Reuel,” and “Horeb” rather than “Sinai.” In the current form of the Pentateuch, Yahwistic material is usually thought to dominate and Elohist material to serve primarily as expansions or revisions of Yahwistic passages. The Elohist’s work is usually dated sometime in the tenth–eighth century BCE and located within prophetic circles in the north. This fits with the material’s emphatic concern with idolatry, worship, and charismatic leadership. Elohist material begins with the call of Abraham (Gen. 12) and therefore does not have a primeval history. Among passages most prominently mentioned as Elohist are Gen. 22:1–19 (the binding of Isaac); Gen. 28:10–22 (Jacob’s dream at Bethel); Gen. 40:1–23 (the dreams of Joseph’s fellow prisoners); Exod. 18:1–27 (Moses’s meeting with Jethro); and Exod. 20:1–26 (the giving of the Ten Commandments).

Deuteronomist (dyoo'tuh-ron'uh-mist), the term used in biblical studies for the author(s) responsible for one of four principal streams of tradition incorporated into the Pentateuch. The abbreviation employed for this person (or simply for the tradition) is **D**. According to the dominant version of this hypothesis, the material attributed to D consists of the core of our current book of Deuteronomy and is probably to be equated with the book of the law that was promulgated by King Josiah in 622 BCE (2 Kings 22–23). Further, the theological perspective attributed to D is thought to have been determinative for a later history writer or writers responsible for shaping the material contained in the books of Joshua–2 Kings. That person or persons is referred to as the Deuteronomistic Historian.

Scholars today generally agree that Genesis is the combined work of J (Yahwist) and P (Priestly), and that Genesis 1:1–2:4a is the work of P, dating to the time of the Babylonian Exile (6th century B.C.), and was written to counter Babylonian mythology and to give captive Israel hope in a time of despair. The Genesis account established that God is the sole creator—that God’s powerful word created all that is—and that humans stand at the apex of all that God created. Our proper response is to obey God’s command, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (1:28).

Claus Westermann suggested that Genesis 1-11 is composed primarily of narratives and lists. “The narratives involve disobedience and disaster in the human family.... The lists are different. Woven in and around the narratives of disaster, they represent the rhythm and flow of God’s blessing that cannot be destroyed by human disobedience.... Genesis 1:1—2:3...has more the character of a ‘list’ than a narrative.... But this account goes beyond many list genres in that it uses the praise language of hymns similar to that of Psalm 104.... Isaiah 40-55, speaking expressly to the disaster of the Babylonian Exile, uses the same hymnic creation language to announce God’s intervention in behalf of that community (cf., for example, Is. 40:17-20)” (Roop, 33-34).

These accounts of the creation are intended neither as a scientific nor a journalistic account, but are rather theological reflections of people-of-faith intended to inform and strengthen people-of-faith.

The Jews titled each book of the Hebrew Scriptures by the first word of the book. The Hebrew title of Genesis is Beresit, which means, “In the beginning.”

When was the Pentateuch written and edited to its present form?

- King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon lays siege to the city of Jerusalem in 597 BCE. Installs Zedekiah as tributary king of Judah.
- Zedekiah revolts against Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar responds by invading Judah and laying siege to the city in 589 BCE. The city was razed to the ground. Only a few people were permitted to remain in the land. The rest were taken into captivity in Babylon.
- In 539 BCE, King Cyrus of Persia defeats the Babylonians and allows the exiles to return home

Think about what this experience meant for the people of Israel.

- Because of their disobedience God allowed them to be defeated

- Their temple had been destroyed
- They had been removed from the Holy Land
- Then they are allowed to return.
- Upon return to the land that God had given them, they want to know:
 - How can we prevent this from happening again?
 - That's the message and story of the Pentateuch!

Genesis – Part 1 of the Story—An Introduction

Key Themes:

Land, People, and Struggle; God's relationship with Israel

Structure:

Genesis 1-11 The Background

Genesis 12-50 The Story of Israel from Abraham to Egypt

Show video: [Genesis 1-11 \(The Bible Project\)](#)

Genesis 1 – Who is God?

Creator of the Cosmos; creates order from chaos (days 1 to 3) and fills the emptiness (days 4 to 6)

Tohubohu – “formless void” in Hebrew; two words: *tohu* – formless and *bohu* – empty

The earth is an empty and mysterious deep. Not about where the earth came from, but how God tamed the chaos.

Is God a God of violence and destruction or a God of love, joy and creativity?

Babylonian creation stories: Enuma Elish, Marduk cuts grandmother in half to create heavens and the earth

Israel: God wills it, speaks it and it happens

Babylonians: The Epic of Atrahasis, humans created as an afterthought, as grunt workers for the gods.

Israelites: all of humanity bears God's image and likeness, very good; and given royal status; dominion over all creatures.

Also, Most Kings of the world place their image on coins and images of themselves all over the realm to remind the people who is in control and who has status. The God of Israel made human kind in his image. Humanity is the image. Think about how this relates to the second commandment. Why shouldn't humanity create idols or things to represent the image of God. Because God has already and definitively created his own idol.

Genesis 1 – Description of Creation

Think snow globe inside a snow globe. That is the cosmology described there. Water above and below, separated by sky. But it's not creation ex nihilo (out of nothing). It's not about how the earth came into existence, but rather how the abyss, the deep, the chaos was put in order.

We can think of it like having a messy table covered with items and we want to play a game of Monopoly on that table. In order to play, we first need to clean off the table and make order from the chaos. Once that has happened, we can then fill the table with the pieces for the game. That's essentially what God does in Genesis 1, creates order out of chaos, creates livable space and then fills it and calls it good. Human beings created and given dominion; created in the image of God.

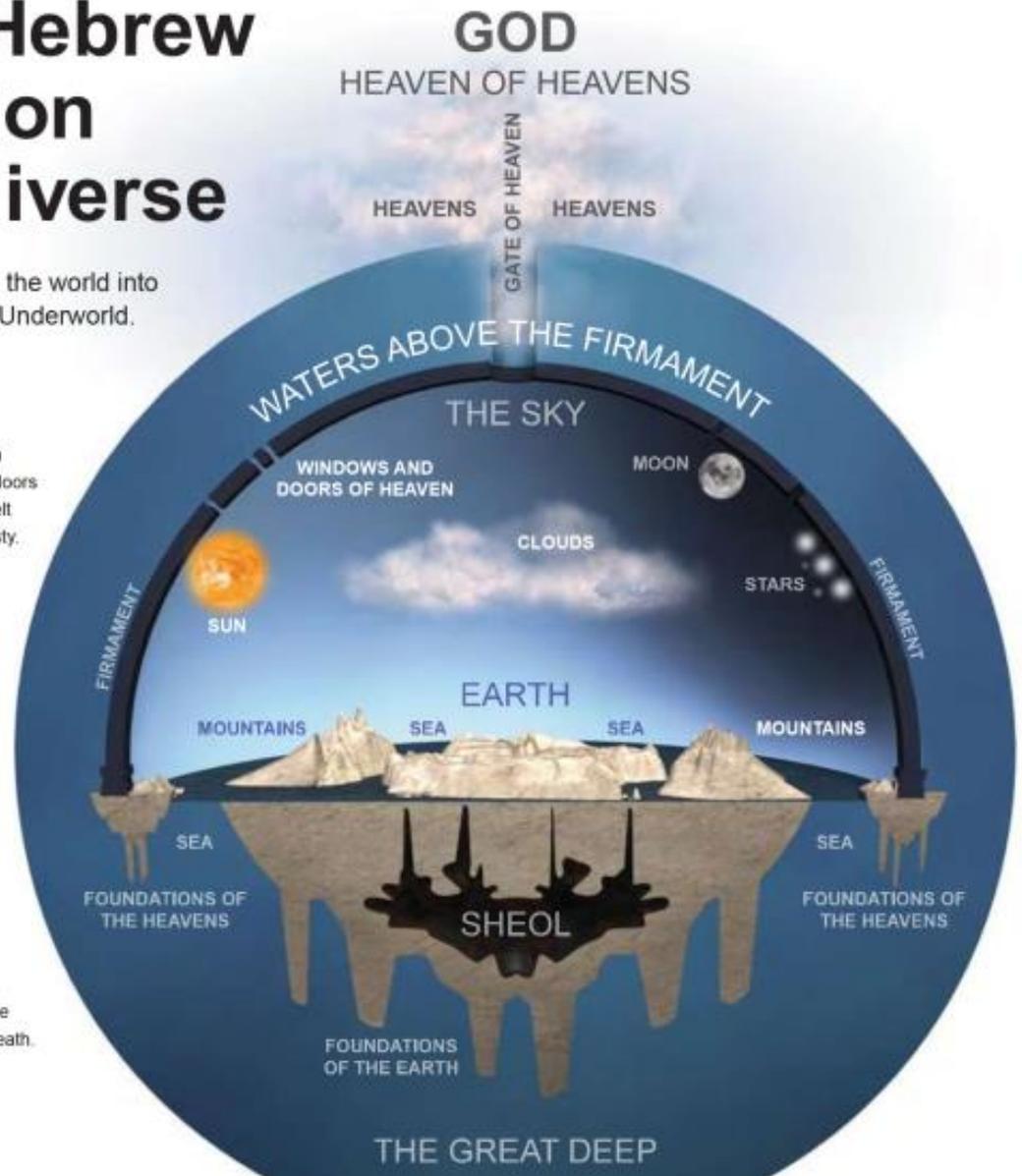
Ancient Hebrew Conception of the Universe

The ancient Israelites divided the world into Heaven, Earth, Sea, and the Underworld.

They viewed the sky as a vault resting on foundations—perhaps mountains—with doors and windows that let in the rain. God dwelt above the sky, hidden in cloud and majesty.

The world was viewed as a disk floating on the waters, secured or moored by pillars. The earth was the only known domain—the realm beyond it was considered unknowable.

The Underworld (Sheol) was a watery or dusty prison from which no one returned. Regarded as a physical place beneath the earth, it could be reached only through death.





Genesis 2-4 – Adam is Israel; a second creation story

Vs. 4 “an account of the heavens and earth when they were created”

Placing the two creation stories side by side we see a couple of things:

Genesis 1—Vegetation created on day 3 and humans on day 6

Genesis 2—humans created before vegetation

Genesis 1—All animals created first, then humans

Genesis 2—Adam created, then all animals, look for suitable partner, none found, woman created

Genesis 1—Notion of God above it all, mover and shaper of things

Genesis 2—God acts more human like, down in the dirt, molding humanity from dirt

Yet, they are back to back and the ancient Israelites have no problem with the discrepancies. Why?

Each story has a different purpose. And it's not to tell us how the world came into existence or define the science of our universe and write the history of the earth.

Genesis 1 focuses on how God is different from (and better than) the gods of the Babylonians

Genesis 2 is focused on the story of Israel as God's people. It's the story of Israel in miniature. Adam is Israel:

- Adam is created by God but then exiled from paradise for disobeying God's command
- Israel is created by God, exiled from Canaan for disobeying God's law

Show video: [The Image of God \(The Bible Project\)](#)

Ancient Babylonian Creation Story

There is a creation myth about the Sumerian gods Anu, Enlil, and Enki, gods of sky, wind, and water, "when gods were in the ways of men." Following the Cleromancy (casting of lots), sky is ruled by Anu, earth by Enlil, and the freshwater sea by Enki. Enlil assigned junior divines to do farm labor and maintain the rivers and canals, but after forty years the lesser gods or dingirs rebelled and refused to do strenuous labor. Instead of punishing the rebels, Enki, who is also the kind, wise counselor of the gods, suggested that humans be created to do the work. The mother goddess Mami is assigned the task of creating humans by shaping clay figurines mixed with the flesh and blood of the slain god Geshtu-E, "a god who had intelligence" (his name means "ear" or "wisdom"). All the gods in turn spit upon the clay. After 10 months, a specially-made womb breaks open and humans are born.