

# GENESIS—WEEK 1

## IN THE BEGINNING



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is The Creation by Michael van der Borch (~1300 – 1370)  
On display at the Museum Meermanno in The Hague, Netherlands*

Genesis is the foundation of the Bible. Understand what God is trying to teach us in this opening work and the rest of scripture becomes clear. Misunderstand it, and you'll misunderstand everything else.

In week 1, we look at the relationship between science and the Bible, following creation up through day 3. This gives us perspective.

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We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

Genesis 1:1–13 — In the Beginning  
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1 Titus 1:2

*in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.*

In 1905, in a single issue of *Annalen der Physik*, a young patent examiner published three landmark papers. One, on Brownian motion, was original enough to have sourced a PhD dissertation. Another, titled “*On a Heuristic Point of View about the Creation and Conversion of Light*,” would win its young author the 1921 Nobel Prize in Physics.

But the third one was the biggie. Titled, “*On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies*,” it would make its author’s name synonymous with genius. Albert Einstein had figured out that time isn’t what we think it is.

Ironically titled “relativity,” Einstein’s theory postulated that one absolute—the speed of light—underpinned the laws of physics. From this, many wonderful things can be derived. The mass of an object is a function of its speed relative to the speed of light. This leads to  $E=mc^2$ . Atomic energy is understood in terms of that equation.

Einstein also showed that time is a function of speed and gravity. This amazing concept has profound implications that reach even into biblical hermeneutics.

Relativity isn’t just a theory; it’s a fact that NASA deals with every day. The Global Positioning System must account for the effects of relativity. Otherwise, your GPS wouldn’t work. Einstein introduced a concept called “time dilation,” which is that time slows down when you’re moving fast or in the presence of gravity. This is best illustrated in what is known as “The Twins Paradox.”

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-does-relativity-theor/>

Imagine twins, one of whom becomes an astronaut. If the astronaut goes on a long trip, traveling very fast, he’ll be younger when he returns than the twin that stayed home. That twin may have even been dead for centuries. Astronauts on the International Space Station are affected, though only by a fraction of a second. Still, that much time dilation could throw the Global Positioning System way off.

Another great example of time dilation is that time runs faster on the moon than on earth.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-00185-z>

The theological implications of time dilation are simple but important. Time cannot be self-existent. Thus God must have created time. This is in perfect harmony with the Titus 1:2 quote above.

Many Bible verses imply that God created time. Good. Anything else would show the Bible to be a creation of man. For a more thorough explanation, see the first Sunday Special.

<https://www.ailbe.org/columns/thedeep/item/19428-sunday-special>

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Faith is not belief without evidence. Belief without evidence is blind faith.

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* — Hebrews 11:1 (KJV)

Evidence (sometimes called general revelation) is all around us. The Bible helps us understand the evidence, and the evidence helps us understand the Bible.

2 Genesis 1:1a

*In the beginning God...*

There was a beginning, and science has come around to agreeing with the Bible. Scientists now say that the universe began with a bang—the big bang.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big\\_Bang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Bang)

But there's another big agreement between science and the Bible—one that may be more profound. Both say that time itself also had a beginning.

<http://www.hawking.org.uk/the-beginning-of-time.html>

*This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, — 2 Timothy 1:9b (NIV)*

If God created time, He has dominion over it. That makes Him more powerful than we can imagine. Give me dominion over time and a Swiss Army knife, and I can defeat every army that has ever marched.

Furthermore, God has unlimited do-overs. He can fix any mistake (not that He ever makes any).

God doesn't need to use His do-over power because He is also infinitely wise. Still, the existence of this option (along with all the other implications of His dominion over time) undermines many simple perspectives on predestination.

This is not something we're wired to understand, but any theology that limits God's power is flawed.

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Then what is prayer? God knows what we're going to do before we do it. So, why pray?

Because He told us to. Regular cause and effect work the same as we always thought they did. You can't stop praying (or doing anything else) just because God is sovereign. He created cause and effect too.

This raises a lot of tough topics. It's good to let them challenge us and to seek understanding, but we shouldn't let our limited understanding get us down. These topics are basically beyond human understanding. We can't do much more than get comfortable with them.

Ask God for help in this. The goal is to get to a point where tough issues don't interfere with worship and service. It's good to ask for understanding, but we must avoid getting greedy about it.

Ultimately, we're asking for patience and humility. We need to get comfortable with who we are and with who He is.

God understands the things that we don't understand and cannot understand (this side of eternity anyway).

We should count our blessings that we get to connect to Him.

3 Genesis 1:1a — continued

*In the beginning God ...*

In addition to Titus 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:9 saying time has a beginning, Christianity views eternity, not as a place of infinite time, but as a place outside of time. Once again, science and the Bible are in harmony. But if eternity is outside of time, what will Heaven be like? Is our concept of Heaven totally simplistic?

Of course it is. Our concept of everything is simplistic. The Bible is a finite book about an infinite subject. If our reaction to it is anything other than humility, we're kidding ourselves.

Fortunately, the Bible is specifically written for us. Parts of it stretch our simple minds to their limits, but we are spared the stuff that we could never grasp. We are left knowing that God does perform miracles, and we shouldn't expect to understand how. We don't even always know why.

Mathematics and science have opened doors into a world beyond our imagination. Relativity is one example, but there are others. The field of Complex Numbers is strange enough to give any student pause.

Look over a university catalog and you'll find a high-level mathematics course named something like "Complex Variables." It's all based on the square root of minus 1, which they call "*i*". Since the square of any number is positive, the square root of a negative number is impossible. Mathematicians call such numbers "imaginary," as opposed to regular numbers, which they call "real." These labels seem pretty fair. When combined, they're called "complex numbers" (another fair name, unfortunately).

The whole thing seems ridiculous, but apply algebra and calculus to complex numbers and things start to get interesting. As you pound further and further into the topic, it starts to yield some dramatic and useful results. Many tough problems are made much simpler by using complex variables. Furthermore, complex variables can be used to solve some problems that have no other known solutions. Even more amazingly, the complex variables methods never yield a false result. These crazy tricks are reliable.

And that's not all. Some of the most important equations in physics have *i* in them (e.g., Schrödinger's Equation). Physicists are frustrated by this, but without any workable alternative, the *i* remains. They use words like "less agreeable" for the presence of *i* in these key equations, but physics is all about results and the equations with *i* in them work. Thus, they have survived a century of great minds looking for a more palatable substitute.

The student is left wondering just how awesome the whole truth might be, and also wondering just how unawesome we are. This too agrees with the Bible. General revelation coughs up some pretty cool stuff.

*The Heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of His hands. — Psalm 19:1*

*You take the red pill; you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes. — Morpheus (in The Matrix)*

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Be awed by God's creation; in that you'll be awed by God. Unfortunately, we seem to lack that awe. This is sad, given the steady stream of awe-inspiring things we get from science. Here's an example from 2018 on NASA's astronomy picture of the day website. Be sure to read the explanation.

<https://apod.nasa.gov/apod/ap180807.html>

4 Genesis 1:1–2

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

There's no way we can comprehend what a partially created universe was like. Before there was light, was the speed of light established? (As we've noted, many of the laws of physics are affected by the speed of light.) Did gravity exist? Did 2 plus 2 equal 4 yet?

These things are way above our pay grade, but we're supposed to read the story of creation and try to understand it—even if we know we won't get it exactly right.

Fortunately, modern man has one tool that gives us a reasonable rendering of God's view of the earth—a globe. When the Earth was new, it probably didn't look exactly like a globe (it didn't have the different countries shown in bright colors).

*The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.*

Still, a globe is a useful image of the earth and an appropriate one to use when reading Genesis.

Of course, “*without form and void*” can mean almost anything. The Earth may not have even had a specific shape.

Curiously, this agrees with how cosmologists see creation. They model planetary formation as a gradual coming together of bits as the planet “clears out its neighborhood” (sweeps up all the other bits in its orbit). At first, a planet is a bunch of lumps gathered together but without any form.

Eventually, all those bits coalesce more or less into a ball.

It would be a mistake to think that any specific way of visualizing this is how it really was.

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Consider the size of God's creation. The surface of the Earth is 197 million square miles. Anyone who has seen one percent of it is a world-traveling jetsetter.

And the earth is just a speck in the solar system. In a scale model of the solar system with the Sun the size of a softball, the Earth is the size of a grain of sand and Uranus is a quarter mile away.

And the solar system is a tiny dot compared to the Milky Way galaxy, which is a tiny dot compared to the Virgo Supercluster of galaxies, which is ...

And the creator of all this actually cares about the tiny two-legged creatures He made in His image. Clearly, our significance is not due to our size.

“Awesome” doesn't even begin to say it.

5 Genesis 1:3–5 (ESV)

*And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

These three verses describe a lot. The first two verses of Genesis seem to cover the creation of space and matter. These next three seem to cover the creation of energy and time (maybe even the laws of physics). This is, yet again, beyond our comprehension.

But what we can understand is precious beyond measure, though it takes some effort to glean.

The key word in this passage is “separated” (יָבַדַּל, yab-dal in Hebrew). It literally means separate, divide, distinguish, or set apart. What makes this so interesting is that this separation is an aspect of light but not of sound. Sound travels around corners; light does not. So, in a shadow, with nothing else around to generate or reflect light, the darkness is pitch black.

This is important in space. If you’re on the dark side of a spaceship or a planet, the only light is starlight or moonlight. You cannot see the sunlight streaming past unless you poke your head out of the shadow and into the light.

If this wasn’t true, it would be virtually impossible to get any usable pictures from the Hubble Space Telescope. But in fact, as long as it’s not pointed towards the sun, the sunlight streaming by doesn’t interfere, in the slightest, with the light coming in from whatever the telescope is looking at.

But at this point in creation, the sun and moon don’t exist yet. We aren’t told where the light is coming from, but some places are lit and some aren’t.

So, picture a globe—all alone without the sun or the moon. Light exists and has been made distinct from darkness. Some of the globe is in the light, which is called Day. Some of the globe is in the dark, which is called Night. The boundaries between the two are evening and morning.

*And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

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As awesome as this is, we would even know about it if it weren’t for the saints who were involved in getting these words to us. Thousands of people, over thousands of years, carefully copied these passages. Then thousands more worked on translating them into English. Even though it may not look like it, this was a coordinated, team effort.

You are part of that team. You may not be involved in translation, but you have some calling to help spread God’s word to the world. Furthermore, that calling can change over time. Right now, your calling could be something like make coffee before church. That used to be my calling.

Never stop asking God what he has in store for you next. Serve Him more and He will use you more.

6 Genesis 1:6–13 (NIV)

*And God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.” So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse “sky.” And there was evening and there was morning—the second day.*

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

*Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation, seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear 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. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning—the third day.*

There are significant translation difficulties here. The Hebrew word translated as “expanse” (רָקִיעַ, ra-qui-ah) can also be “firmament” and the word translated as “sky” (שָׁמַיִם, sha-my-eem) can also be “heaven.”

But verses 6–8 seem to be describing the creation of the Earth’s atmosphere and then the separation of the clouds from the seas. This could be the creation of evaporation and the water cycle—or maybe God just cranked up the light until it got strong enough to start that.

Verse nine and ten describe the separation of the land from the seas. If God used natural processes to do this, then it involved some violent plate tectonics. The earthquakes we have nowadays are nothing compared to the ones that could have formed the continents and mountains.

Plants need light, air, soil and rain. So, with all those now in place, God created the plants.

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Those plants are an amazing gift. Not only are they food; they’re the origin of medicine. Some medicines are now made artificially, but plants were the first. We got the idea of medicines from seeing the effect certain plants, or parts of plants, had on us.

That has led to many wonders. Modern medicine is progressing at an astonishing pace. There’s a huge list of diseases that used to be incurable, which we can now cure, and the list grows every year.

And surgery allows us to fix things that used to be unfixable. Plants lie at the root of that, too (pun intended). The first anesthetics were certain kinds of plant leaves. The Great Physician doesn’t just bless with supernatural healing; the “man-made” cures are His blessing too.

This is not to minimize the importance of asking for supernatural healing; never forget to ask for the LORD’s help. This kind of prayer is important for a surprising reason—timing. Many prayers for healing end up being long-term, and long-term prayers have a way of going down unexpected paths. We ask God to do something for us, and instead we learn what we’re supposed to do.

That makes sense. He is the LORD, after all.



*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. The Bible specifically lists “the gift of faith.” What does that gift look like?
2. Have you ever prayed for God to make you humble?
3. What is your favorite awesome thing in all of creation?
4. Have you ever look at a globe and wondered about how little of it you know?
5. What is your current calling? Do you expect it to change?
6. Have you ever started praying for something and noticed that your prayers got redirected?