

---

# Genesis

## Part One

---

Genesis 1:1–25:18

---

**Joan E. Cook**

with Little Rock Scripture Study staff



*A ministry of the Diocese of Little Rock  
in partnership with Liturgical Press*

*Nihil obstat* for the commentary text by Joan E. Cook: Reverend Robert C. Harren, *Censor deputatus*.  
*Imprimatur* for the commentary text by Joan E. Cook: † Most Reverend John F. Kinney, Bishop of St. Cloud, Minnesota, December 17, 2010.

Cover design by Ann Blattner. Interior art by Ned Bustard.

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Excerpts from the English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for use in the United States of America copyright © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana. English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* copyright © 1997, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with Permission.



This symbol indicates material that was created by Little Rock Scripture Study to supplement the biblical text and commentary. Some of these inserts first appeared in the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*; others were created specifically for this book by Clifford M. Yeary.

Commentary by Joan E. Cook, © 2011, 2018 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever, except brief quotations in reviews, without written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, MN 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

Inserts adapted from *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*, © 2011 by Little Rock Scripture Study, Little Rock, Arkansas; additional inserts, prayers, and study questions by Little Rock Scripture Study staff, © 2018 by Little Rock Scripture Study. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without the written permission of the copyright holder. Published by Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321. Printed in the United States of America.

1                    2                    3                    4                    5                    6                    7                    8                    9

---

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Cook, Joan E.

Title: Genesis / Joan E. Cook with Little Rock Scripture Study staff.

Other titles: Bible. Genesis. English. New American. 2018.

Description: Collegeville, Minnesota : Liturgical Press, 2018— | Series: Little Rock Scripture Study.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018028646 (print) | LCCN 2018047300 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814663950 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814663707 (pt. one) | ISBN 9780814663714 (pt. two)

Subjects: LCSH: Bible. Genesis—Textbooks. | Bible. Genesis—Study and teaching—Catholic Church. | Catholic Church—Doctrines.

Classification: LCC BS1233 (ebook) | LCC BS1233 .N43 2018 (print) | DDC 222/.11052056—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018028646>



## DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

2500 North Tyler Street • P.O. Box 7565 • Little Rock, Arkansas 72217 • (501) 664-0340 Fax (501) 664-6304

Dear Friends,

The Bible is a gift of God to the church, the people gathered around the world throughout the ages in the name of Christ. God uses this sacred writing to continue to speak to us in all times and places.

I encourage you to make it your own by dedicated prayer and study with others and on your own. Little Rock Scripture Study is a ministry of the Catholic Diocese of Little Rock. It provides the tools you need to faithfully understand what you are reading, to appreciate its meaning for you and for our world, and to guide you in a way that will deepen your own ability to respond to God's call.

It is my hope that the Word of God will empower you as Christians to live a life worthy of your call as a child of God.

Sincerely in Christ,

✠ Anthony B. Taylor  
Bishop of Little Rock





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome	7
What materials will you use?	7
How will you use these materials?	8
Lesson One (Introduction and Genesis 1–3)	11
Lesson Two (Genesis 4–10)	27
Lesson Three (Genesis 11–15)	41
Lesson Four (Genesis 16–20)	55
Lesson Five (Genesis 21:1–25:18)	69
Praying with Your Group	84
Reflecting on Scripture	86

Wrap-up lectures are available for each lesson at no charge. The link to these free lectures is [LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/GenesisPartOne](http://LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/GenesisPartOne).



# Welcome

The Bible is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is the Spirit-inspired word of God for us. It reveals to us the God who created, redeemed, and guides us still. It speaks to us personally and as a church. It forms the basis of our public liturgical life and our private prayer lives. It urges us to live worthily and justly, to love tenderly and wholeheartedly, and to be a part of building God's kingdom here on earth.

Though it was written a long time ago, in the context of a very different culture, the Bible is no relic of the past. Catholic biblical scholarship is among the best in the world, and in our time and place, we have unprecedented access to it. By making use of solid scholarship, we can discover much about the ancient culture and religious practices that shaped those who wrote the various books of the Bible. With these insights, and by praying with the words of Scripture, we allow the words and images to shape us as disciples. By sharing our journey of faithful listening to God's word with others, we have the opportunity to be stretched in our understanding and to form communities of love and learning. Ultimately, studying and praying with God's word deepens our relationship with Christ.

## **Genesis, Part One** **Genesis 1:1–25:18**


The resource you hold in your hands is divided into five lessons. Each lesson involves personal prayer and study using this book *and* the experience of group prayer, discussion, and wrap-up lecture.

If you are using this resource in the context of a small group, we suggest that you meet five times, discussing one lesson per meeting. Allow about 90 minutes for the small group gathering. Small groups function best with eight to twelve people to ensure good group dynamics and to allow all to participate as they wish.

### WHAT MATERIALS WILL YOU USE?

The materials in this book include:

- The text of Genesis, chapters 1:1–25:18, using the New American Bible, Revised Edition as the translation.

- Commentary by Joan E. Cook (which has also been published separately as part of the New Collegeville Bible Commentary series).
- Occasional inserts  highlighting elements of the chapters of Genesis being studied. Some of these appear also in the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible* while others are supplied by staff writers.
- Questions for study, reflection, and discussion at the end of each lesson.
- Opening and closing prayers for each lesson, as well as other prayer forms available in the closing pages of the book.

In addition, there are wrap-up lectures available for each lesson. Your group may choose to purchase a DVD containing these lectures or make use of the audio or video lectures online at no charge. The link to these free lectures is: [LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/GenesisPartOne](http://LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/GenesisPartOne). Of course, if your group has access to qualified speakers, you may choose to have live presentations.

Each person will need a current translation of the Bible. We recommend the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*, which makes use of the New American Bible, Revised Edition. Other translations, such as the New Jerusalem Bible or the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, would also work well.

## HOW WILL YOU USE THESE MATERIALS?

### **Prepare in advance**

Using Lesson One as an example:

- Begin with a simple prayer like the one found on page 11.
- Read the assigned material in the printed book for Lesson One (pages 12–22) so that you are prepared for the weekly small group session. You may do this assignment by reading a portion over a period of several days (effective and manageable) or by preparing all at once (more challenging).
- Answer the questions, Exploring Lesson One, found at the end of the assigned reading, pages 23–24.
- Use the Closing Prayer on page 25 when you complete your study. This prayer may be used again when you meet with the group.



## **Meet with your small group**

- After introductions and greetings, allow time for prayer (about 5 minutes) as you begin the group session. You may use the prayer found on page 11 (also used by individuals in their preparation) or use a prayer of your choosing.
- Spend about 45–50 minutes discussing the responses to the questions that were prepared in advance. You may also develop your discussion further by responding to questions and interests that arise during the discussion and faith-sharing itself.
- Close the discussion and faith-sharing with prayer, about 5–10 minutes. You may use the Closing Prayer at the end of each lesson or one of your choosing at the end of the book. It is important to allow people to pray for personal and community needs and to give thanks for how God is moving in your lives.
- Listen to or view the wrap-up lecture associated with each lesson (15–20 minutes). You may watch the lecture online, use a DVD, or provide a live lecture by a qualified local speaker. This lecture provides a common focus for the group and reinforces insights from each lesson. You may view the lecture together at the end of the session or, if your group runs out of time, you may invite group members to watch the lecture on their own time after the discussion.

*Above all, be aware that the Holy Spirit is moving within and among you.*



# Genesis

## Part One

### LESSON ONE

---

#### Introduction and Genesis 1–3

---

Begin your personal study and group discussion with a simple and sincere prayer such as:

#### *Prayer*

*O God of creation, be with me in my study and reflection, and continue to create in me a hunger for your voice.*

Read the Introduction on pages 12–15 and the Bible text of Genesis 1–3 found in the outside columns of pages 16–22, highlighting what stands out to you.

Read the accompanying commentary to add to your understanding.

Respond to the questions on pages 23–24, Exploring Lesson One.

The Closing Prayer on page 25 is for your personal use and may be used at the end of group discussion.

## INTRODUCTION

Genesis is a story about beginnings: of the universe, of humans, of joys and sorrows, successes and failures. The book focuses on the relationships between God and people as well as those among different people. These themes are simple in principle, but often complex in our lives. While the themes of Genesis are universal they can be complex because they are expressed in the styles and settings of the ancient Near East. Before we look at the book itself, several introductory points will facilitate our reading of Genesis.

### **Themes**

Genesis introduces several themes that permeate the entire Bible. The first of these is divine causality; that is, the ancient people believed that the deities caused everything that happened in life. The ancient Israelites came to believe in only one God, whose name they eventually learned was Lord or “I AM” (Exod 3:14). They believed that the one God who caused everything to happen took a special interest in them. This divine-human relationship was understood as essential, and it applied not only to the relationship between God and the people, but also among people.

An implication of the importance of relationships is the setting of boundaries between God and creatures, including human beings, and between different creatures. The boundaries involved right relationships among all creatures and also between humans and God. In addition, boundaries factored into the topic of land and the possession of land. Finally, intimately connected to the theme of relationship is the theme of promise and blessing. The Creator promises to remember and care for all creation, and carries out that promise in spite of the many ways that creatures violate divinely set boundaries.

### **Ancient storytelling**

Another important topic is the way in which ancient people expressed their beliefs and values and told their story: it is quite different from

the way we today record our past. We strive to record information with great attention to the details of the event, such as when and where it took place, who was involved, what they did and said. Then we use these details in our efforts to interpret the event we record. But in the ancient world, the project of remembering the past took a different form. People were not as concerned with recording the precise details of an event as they were in probing its meaning. To that end they told stories.

This means of communication was ideally suited to nonliterate cultures, peoples who depended on oral communication because very few could read and write. The stories they told embodied the larger meanings they found in situations and events, and related them in ways their listeners would remember and pass down to their descendants. In fact, we will note throughout Genesis that some events were recounted more than once, with different points of focus and emphasis. The variations were included because each one added to the meaning of the event, and to the overall picture of the people’s relationship with one another and with their God.

### **Ancient Near Eastern parallels**

Several Genesis stories have parallels in other ancient Near Eastern cultures. The best-known of these are the Mesopotamian creation myth called *Enuma Elish*, of which echoes can be seen in the Genesis creation stories, and a Mesopotamian myth about the quest for immortality called the Epic of Gilgamesh, of which traces are evident in the Genesis flood story. Other parts of Genesis include what appear to be allusions to ancient stories. The parallel stories provide plots and themes onto which the Genesis narratives superimposed the ancient Israelites’ beliefs. We will comment on *Enuma Elish* and the Epic of Gilgamesh in our discussion of the biblical creation and flood stories.

### **Documentary hypothesis**

As the ancient Near Eastern people continued to tell their stories throughout the genera-

tions, the stories took on characteristic themes and motifs typical of their particular geographical localities and political and socioeconomic situations. When the people eventually began to write down their stories, these particularities became part of the narrative. The process of recording the material was a complex one that extended over hundreds of years. In the past 150 years, scholars have studied this question and have developed a theory as to how the first five books of the Bible (also known as the Pentateuch, which includes the book of Genesis) developed into the form we have today. That theory is known as the Documentary Hypothesis. We will look at the contemporary understanding of this theory with regard to the book of Genesis, because an understanding of how the book probably came into its present form is helpful to an understanding of the book's content.

According to the theory, the process of setting the stories in writing took place over a period of several hundred years, from about 1000 B.C. to about 500 B.C. Before that the stories circulated by word of mouth in families and clans. Then around 1000 B.C. when David was King of Israel, he took steps to unite the twelve tribes into one people. One of those steps was to commission his scribes to write down the people's stories, weaving them into one. This early strand of Genesis (in fact, of the entire Pentateuch) is called J to represent the German spelling of the word Yahweh (Jahweh), the name by which this strand of the Pentateuch refers to God.

After King Solomon's death about one hundred years later, the kingdom David had established broke into two: the northern and southern kingdoms. The southern kingdom, Judah, believed it was the one that remained loyal to God and to the divine promises. The northern kingdom, Israel, set about establishing a new identity, and one of its steps was to rewrite parts of the early J story, inserting new details and substituting different names according to their own regional usage. This strand was woven into the earlier story, and the new strand became known as E because it calls God Elohim.

About five hundred years later, the city of Jerusalem and the entire southern kingdom of Judah endured a traumatic defeat by the Babylonians. They destroyed the temple, which had become the central place of worship. They also imprisoned the king and took into exile many leading members of the Jerusalem community. This defeat represented not only a political act but also the violation of the divine promises that had sustained the people since the time of Abraham and Sarah, over one thousand years before. The upheaval caused the people to rethink the beliefs that had sustained them throughout those one thousand years. The result was two additional strands. The first is known as D and represents the efforts of the people to understand their exile in terms of the message of the book of Deuteronomy: reliance on the covenant, or the formal terms of the relationship between God and the people. The D writers understood the exile as punishment for their own violation of the terms God had set down for the people. They believed that the exile was not a failure of the deity to keep the divine promises, but rather the failure of the people to live up to them.

Finally, a group of priests, also working to understand the meaning of the exile, preserved a record of how they had practiced their religion when it was centered in the Jerusalem temple. They did this because they saw the temple worship as the norm for public practice of religion. They wanted to preserve this record in the hope that one day they would return to Jerusalem, rebuild the temple, and resume temple worship according to the record they left for future generations. And if the exile did not end, at least there would be a record of how religion was practiced in the "good old days" of temple-centered religion. This strand is called P for the priestly authors who are believed to have written it. These last two groups, D and P, were probably not simply writers but also editors, who worked their strands into the earlier ones and gave the entire Pentateuch the shape we know today.

This summary gives an idea of the stages in the writing of Genesis. We can also categorize

the four strands in terms of their characteristic features. We have seen that the writers and editors used different names for the deity: the Yahwist, or J, used the term  $\text{YHWH}$ , the name God gave to Moses at the burning bush in response to Moses' request in Exodus 3:13-14. The Elohist, on the other hand, used the name Elohim, a term that originally meant "gods" and that ancient Israel used in referring to their own God. A shortened form of the word is "El," another term we find in Genesis. The editors we call P also used the term Elohim to refer to the deity.

The four sources have other characteristics, too. The J strand is the storytelling piece, with details that enable us to see, hear, and feel the events described in that strand of the narrative. Its descriptions of the deity are vivid and concrete: they describe God in ways that we humans can identify with, as we will see in Genesis 2. On the other hand, the E strand tends to focus on the transcendence of God, describing the divine presence in dreams and other ways that highlight the mysterious quality of divine presence and action. The D strand tends to be solemn and formal, and to emphasize the cause-and-effect quality of human actions while at the same time recognizing divine inbreakings in unexpected and surprising ways. Finally, the P strand focuses on concerns relating to the public practice of religion: the details of rituals, the place of different people within society, the relationships among different people that are often expressed in genealogical lists. Genesis is composed primarily of the J and P strands; we will point them out in the places where it enhances our understanding of the story.

### **Ancient literary genres**

Another element to consider in our reading of the book of Genesis is the ancient genres or types of writings that comprise the book. The people spoke and wrote according to the conventions of the day. There are three main types of writing that appear frequently in Genesis: myths, sagas, and genealogies. The first two are narrative forms. Myths, in the biblical

sense, are not make-believe stories. Rather, they are stories that convey the beliefs and values of the people. We will get a better idea of what this means when we look at the myths in the book. The other narrative genre, the saga, is a story that tells about the past and relates it to the present. The Genesis sagas tell about the beginnings of the world and about events within families. Sagas are predominantly the work of J.

The genealogies appear throughout the book, enumerating the relationships among different generations. These lists are among the latest parts of the book, added during or toward the end of the exile in Babylon to produce a record of who belonged to the group of exiles from Judah. Such a record served several important purposes: it established the record of the family ties of different people, identifying how they belonged to the chosen people. In addition, it supported the claims to the land that became vitally important when the exiles returned to their land and needed to legitimate their claim to it, because others had settled there in their absence. The genealogical lists are the work of P, and they not only identify the relationships among the different people, they also provide an organizing principle for the book of Genesis. We will look at these lists and the information we can learn from them.

By taking note of the three genres—myths, saga, and genealogy—we can understand what the Second Vatican Council document on revelation, *Dei Verbum*, meant in referring to the Bible as the word of God in human language. We believe that the Bible is the word of God, that is, revelation from God. At the same time we believe that it is recorded by human beings who put down the information in the ways people communicated with one another at the time the words were put into writing, according to the genres of the day.

Keeping all these facets in mind—the overall themes of Genesis; the lengthy process of recording and editing that brought the book to the form in which we know it today; the characteristics of the four different strands J, E, D, and P; the literary forms in which the ancient

writers and editors wrote their messages; and the ancient Near Eastern parallel literature—gives us useful tools for understanding the book of Genesis. Now let us look at the contents of the book.

### **Divisions of the book of Genesis**

The Genesis story consists of three parts. The first is the Primeval Story, the story of the earliest beginnings of the universe and of human beings on earth. It is found in chapters 1–11 of Genesis. The second part is the Ancestral Story, the story of several generations who became the ancestors of God's people. They were Abraham and Sarah; Rebekah and Isaac; Jacob and his two wives Leah and Rachel, their maids Bilhah and Zilpah, and their twelve sons and one daughter. This

part of the story is found in chapters 12–36. The final part of the Ancestral Story focuses on one of Jacob's sons, Joseph, and his adventures that resulted in the family of Jacob being given a privileged place in the land of Egypt. This part of the story is found in chapters 37–50.

As we read, we will keep in mind that we are looking simultaneously at two different historical periods: the time described and the time when the story was written down. The way in which each historical, or prehistoric, episode is recorded reflects not only the people's understanding of what happened but also the context in which they wrote: the political, economic, and religious concerns that were important at the time, and through which they found meaning in the ancient narrative.

**Preamble. The Creation of the World**

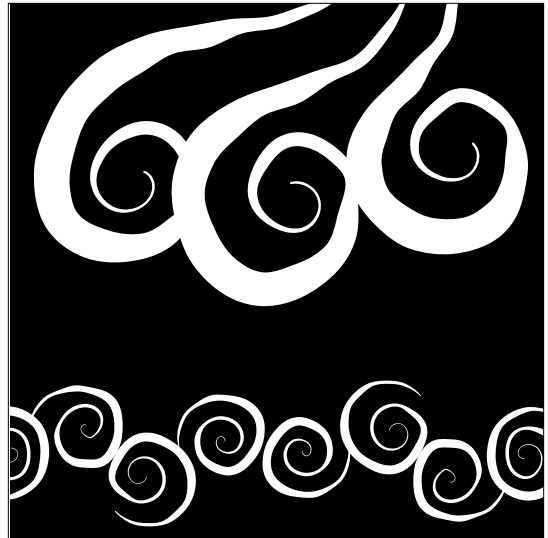
**CHAPTER 1**

*The Story of Creation*

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth—<sup>2</sup>and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters—

<sup>3</sup>Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light. <sup>4</sup>God saw that the light was good. God then separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God

*continue*



**THE PRIMEVAL STORY**

Genesis 1:1–11:28

The Primeval Story in Genesis 1–11 is the story of the earliest beginnings of the universe and of the human race. It talks of prehistoric times, naming a few places that we can identify today such as the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, but for the most part it recounts stories whose details we cannot identify with precision; often we can find parallel stories and themes in other ancient Near Eastern myths. The Primeval Story consists of two creation stories, followed by several examples of humans who missed the mark in their efforts to live up to the ideals of creation. The best known are the stories of Adam, Eve, and the serpent; the murder of Abel by his brother Cain; the Flood; and the tower of Babel. Each of these stories invites us to look at life’s challenges and how we respond to them as individuals and communities.

The Primeval Story takes us back to that primordial time when God created the world. Today we struggle to weigh different theories of how the universe came into being; whether by divine fiat, by evolution, by intelligent design, or by some other means that we do not yet understand. Ancient peoples also struggled to understand how the world came into being. They expressed their questions and theories in stories, rather than in the scientific theories we

propose today. This difference is an important one to note when we read the Old Testament. Ancient peoples used stories to express their beliefs and values. These stories were not primarily concerned with relating the facts of a given situation; rather, they expressed the contemporary meaning their tellers found in ancient events and circumstances.

The first two chapters of Genesis tell two stories of how the world came into being. The two stories have several common elements: one Creator made the universe by shaping and organizing everything within the confines of time and space to make sure that every creature belonged in it and nothing was destroyed. Among all the creatures, humans were given a special place.

Each of the two stories has distinctive features as well. These give each story its unique character.

**1:1–2:3 First creation story**

Genesis 1:1–2:4a describes a seven-day process during which the Creator’s word, “Let there be . . .” brings the different elements of the universe into being. The first three days witness the creation of the environment, and the second three days parallel the first, with the creation of creatures to live in the different spaces in the environment. We can chart this parallel in the following way:



Days 1-3	Days 4-6
Light, Day and Night	Greater Light, Lesser Light, Stars
Water and Sky	Fish and Birds
Land and Sea, Plants	Earth Creatures, Animal and Human

Creation begins with a powerful wind sweeping over the waters. Then the activity of each day begins with the formula, “God said: Let there be . . .” Then the narrative reports the specific activity for the day. At the end of the first, third, fourth, and sixth days, God saw that it was “good.” On the sixth day, after all the creatures had been created, God looked over all of creation and saw that it was “very good” (1:31). The description of each day’s work ends with the notation, “Evening came, and morning followed . . .,” then gives the number of the day. The account illustrates the power ancient people associated with the spoken word: to speak was to set an action in motion; thus speech had a sacramental quality insofar as it caused what it signified. The formulas suggest the unfolding of a ritual: creation occurs according to an organized plan by which God first creates the environment, then populates it with creatures suitable for that particular part of the universe.

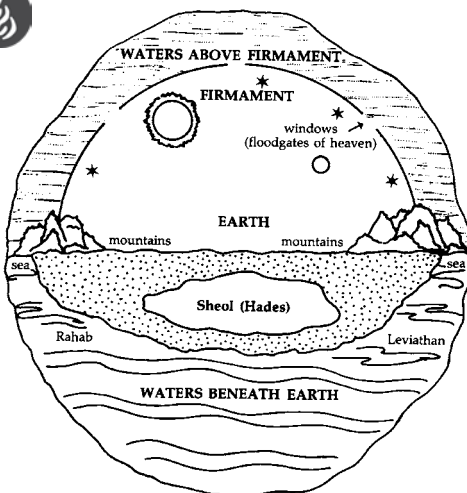


Illustration of ancient cosmology

called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” Evening came, and morning followed—the first day.

<sup>6</sup>Then God said: Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters, to separate one body of water from the other. <sup>7</sup>God made the dome, and it separated the water below the dome from the water above the dome. And so it happened. <sup>8</sup>God called the dome “sky.” Evening came, and morning followed—the second day.

<sup>9</sup>Then God said: Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear. And so it happened: the water under the sky was gathered into its basin, and the dry land appeared. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry land “earth,” and the basin of water he called “sea.” God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup>Then God said: Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it. And so it happened: <sup>12</sup>the earth brought forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree that bears fruit with its seed in it. God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup>Evening came, and morning followed—the third day.

<sup>14</sup>Then God said: Let there be lights in the dome of the sky, to separate day from night. Let

*continue*

In verse 6 the dome, or firmament, represents the ancient Near Eastern concept of a divider between the heavens and the earth. We can picture it as a large bowl inverted and set on a flat surface. Everything under the bowl is inside the firmament, and the rest is outside it.

One of the first acts of creation is to harness the waters by assigning them to specific places in the cosmos. This attention to water highlights its necessity for life, and the need to protect and preserve it in the arid ancient Near Eastern climate.

The separation of light from darkness in 1:14 makes it possible to count the passage of time, not only according to days but also to

them mark the seasons, the days and the years,<sup>15</sup> and serve as lights in the dome of the sky, to illuminate the earth. And so it happened: <sup>16</sup>God made the two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night, and the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set them in the dome of the sky, to illuminate the earth, <sup>18</sup>to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup>Evening came, and morning followed—the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup>Then God said: Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky. <sup>21</sup>God created the great sea monsters and all kinds of crawling living creatures with which the water teems, and all kinds of winged birds. God saw that it was good, <sup>22</sup>and God blessed them, saying: Be fertile, multiply, and fill the water of the seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth. <sup>23</sup>Evening came, and morning followed—the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup>Then God said: Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: tame animals, crawling things, and every kind of wild animal. And so it happened: <sup>25</sup>God made every kind of wild animal, every kind of tame animal, and every kind of thing that crawls on the ground. God saw that it was good. <sup>26</sup>Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth.

<sup>27</sup>God created mankind in his image;  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup>God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth. <sup>29</sup>God also said: See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on all the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; <sup>30</sup>and to all the wild animals, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the

*continue*

seasons and years. God blesses the creatures of the sea, air, and earth (v. 22), commanding them to be fertile and multiply, assuring the continuity of creation.

The Creator gives a special place to humanity in 1:26. Humans, male and female, are made in the image of God. This is a puzzling statement, for which several explanations have been suggested. For example, we were made with the ability to make decisions, just as God does; or we are the visible “image” of the invisible God in the world. As God’s human counterpart, we have the ability to communicate with God and to ask “Why?” when we do not understand. We also have dominion over all the other creatures. This awesome responsibility involves nurturing and protecting all the other creatures in the universe. The biblical story contrasts with the Mesopotamian *Enuma Elish*, which is full of violence and oppression. In that version the gods compete for the opportunity to create the universe. The victor, Marduk, creates humans to serve the gods.

The seventh day is designated as holy because it is God’s day of rest (2:3). In the ancient world “holy” meant “set aside for God.” Legislation concerning sabbath observance relied on this model of divine rest. It gives us an example for how to spend the day of the week that is set aside for God.

This first creation account is the work of the P editor. At the time of its compilation the people of Jerusalem were in exile in Babylon as a result of the Babylonian takeover of the ancient Near East. They were searching for the meaning of their exile, and for evidence that God still cared for them and maintained the universe. The insertion of the account, one of the last to be composed, at the beginning of the entire Bible introduces the themes of one God, divine concern for creatures, the dignity of human beings, and the orderly division of creation into different habitats for different creatures, different times for different activities, and the importance of honoring God in difficult times as well as moments of celebration.

## 2:4-25 Second creation story

Immediately after the first story of creation, a second one follows. Like the first, it highlights the special place of humans in creation, relating it in a storytelling mode. We can picture the divine creative actions: shaping things out of clay, planting a garden, instructing the human on how to act in the garden. The breath of God suggests the same kind of energy found in the first creation story: the blowing wind is an invisible force that causes things to happen. God's first act of creation in this account is to shape a human being from the dust of the earth. Again we notice the importance of water: a stream waters all the ground, making it possible to work the soil, and becomes four rivers. Two of these rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, run through Turkey, Syria, and Iraq.

The prohibition in verse 17 not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil carries with it the threat of death. Death is not explained here; its meaning is already known by the time the story is set in writing, probably around 1000 B.C. The mention of it foreshadows the snake's temptation of the humans in the next chapter, where punishment by death is best explained as an etiological detail, which is an explanation of one of life's realities.

This creation story highlights the importance of relationships: God makes all the other creatures in an effort to provide a suitable companion for the human (v. 18). Only another human can offer that companionship, which finds its ultimate expression in marriage. The solemn wording of verse 24, "That is why . . ." identifies this verse as another etiology, or explanation of the reality of marriage.

This second creation story is the work of J, the storyteller who first collated the ancient stories in an effort to establish a common memory for the tribes united under David. It depicts the work of creation by giving concrete details and describing God in immanent terms. In other words, it depicts God with descriptions that enable us to know God's nearness to us. We can contrast this description with that in the first creation story, which depicts God as

earth, I give all the green plants for food. And so it happened. <sup>31</sup>God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day.

### I. The Story of the Nations

#### CHAPTER 2

<sup>1</sup>Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed. <sup>2</sup>On the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing; he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken. <sup>3</sup>God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation.

#### *The Garden of Eden*

<sup>4</sup>This is the story of the heavens and the earth at their creation. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens— <sup>5</sup>there was no field shrub on earth and no grass of the field had sprouted, for the LORD God had sent no rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the ground, <sup>6</sup>but a stream was welling up out of the earth and watering all the surface of the ground— <sup>7</sup>then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

<sup>8</sup>The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. <sup>9</sup>Out of the ground the LORD God made grow every tree that was delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

*continue*

transcendent, or far beyond our ability to comprehend. The juxtaposition of the two stories illustrates the belief that God is both transcendent and immanent: infinitely beyond our ability to grasp and at the same time here in our midst.

<sup>10</sup>A river rises in Eden to water the garden; beyond there it divides and becomes four branches. <sup>11</sup>The name of the first is the Pishon; it is the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. <sup>12</sup>The gold of that land is good; bdellium and lapis lazuli are also there. <sup>13</sup>The name of the second river is the Gihon; it is the one that winds all through the land of Cush. <sup>14</sup>The name of the third river is the Tigris; it is the one that flows east of Asshur. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

<sup>15</sup>The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it. <sup>16</sup>The LORD God gave the man this order: You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden <sup>17</sup>except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die.

<sup>18</sup>The LORD God said: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him. <sup>19</sup>So the LORD God formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each living creature was then its name. <sup>20</sup>The man gave names to all the tame animals, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be a helper suited to the man.

<sup>21</sup>So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup>The LORD God then built the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman. When he brought her to the man, <sup>23</sup>the man said:

“This one, at last, is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
This one shall be called ‘woman,’  
for out of man this one has been taken.”

<sup>24</sup>That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.

<sup>25</sup>The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame.

*continue*

After the two creation stories, the Primeval Story describes incidents in which humans begin to violate the boundaries the Creator has established between God and creatures. Each of the stories describes the way the boundary is violated, gives a divine declaration of that violation and the tendency to evil, and reports divine actions to restore the balance in the relationship between God and humans. Interwoven with these are etiological tales about place names, customs, or human realities; for example, marriage, the wearing of clothes, the reality of shame, evil, and death. At different points throughout the stories, genealogies name those who belong to the different tribes and clans and specify the relationships among them. The names are often eponymous: names of individuals become the names of groups such as Israel, the name given to Jacob in 32:29.



The Hebrew verb **kabash (subdue)** frequently appears in contexts of war (e.g., 2 Sam 8:11; 2 Chron 28:10) or in situations where one person has power over another (e.g., Esth 7:8). Here, human creatures are given power over other created beings, a power that Saint John Paul II interprets as responsibility (see *The Ecological Crisis*, 3). Far from a view that places humans at the center of creation with a right to dominate the rest of creation, the church is moving toward a recognition that all created reality has integrity and intrinsic value as the sphere of God’s action. “Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man [and woman] must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things which would be in contempt of the Creator and would bring disastrous consequences for human beings and their environment” (CCC, 339).

### 3:1-24 Adam, Eve, and the serpent

The creation story in chapter 2 includes the divine prohibition against eating the fruit of a particular tree that God gave to the first human before the creation of the woman. Here a new creature enters the picture, described only as a snake. No physical description is given until the creature receives the divine punishment for leading the humans into sin (vv. 14-15). At that point the creature loses its legs and is condemned to crawl on the ground, eat dirt, and reach up only to the heels of humans. The creature is a tempter, but is not the devil in the modern sense of that term.

The snake approaches the woman while the man is with her (v. 6), misquoting the divine prohibition by applying it to all the fruit trees (v. 4). She in turn adds to the original prohibition the command not even to touch the forbidden fruit under pain of death (v. 3). The snake's words immediately characterize him as cunning, and the woman's words portray her as eager to observe the divine prohibition. The snake capitalizes on the reason for avoiding the fruit: death will follow. Even though death has not been explained, the story makes clear that the Creator, the snake, and the woman all see it as something to avoid. Here the story resembles other ancient Near Eastern myths that describe the futile efforts of creatures to become immortal. The snake then insinuates that the divine prohibition has a different motive: eating the fruit gives to humans divine knowledge of good and evil; eating the fruit will make the humans like gods.

This is a complex idea: God made the humans in the divine image; the temptation is to eat in order to become more like God by knowing as much as God, ironically, about good and evil. The fruit promises to have more benefits than the snake first mentions: it tastes good, is beautiful, and gives wisdom. The woman eats some, then gives some to the man who does the same. As soon as they have eaten, the snake's promise proves true: they have increased knowledge that shows itself in their awareness of their nakedness. Ironically, the couple now know about good and evil through experience: they have taken it into themselves.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Expulsion from Eden*

<sup>1</sup>Now the snake was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He asked the woman, "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden?'"

<sup>2</sup>The woman answered the snake: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup>it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, or else you will die.'" <sup>4</sup>But the snake said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! <sup>5</sup>God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil." <sup>6</sup>The woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes, and the tree was desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. <sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

<sup>8</sup>When they heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the garden at the breezy time of the day, the man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>The LORD God then called to the man and asked him: Where are you? <sup>10</sup>He answered, "I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid." <sup>11</sup>Then God asked: Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat? <sup>12</sup>The man replied, "The woman whom you put here with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it." <sup>13</sup>The LORD God then asked the woman: What is this you have done? The woman answered, "The snake tricked me, so I ate it."

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD God said to the snake:

Because you have done this,  
cursed are you  
among all the animals, tame or wild;

*continue*

On your belly you shall crawl,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.

<sup>15</sup>I will put enmity between you and the  
woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
They will strike at your head,  
while you strike at their heel.

<sup>16</sup>To the woman he said:  
I will intensify your toil in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children.  
Yet your urge shall be for your husband,  
and he shall rule over you.

<sup>17</sup>To the man he said: Because you listened to  
your wife and ate from the tree about which I  
commanded you, You shall not eat from it,

Cursed is the ground because of you!  
In toil you shall eat its yield  
all the days of your life.

<sup>18</sup>Thorns and thistles it shall bear for you,  
and you shall eat the grass of the field.

<sup>19</sup>By the sweat of your brow  
you shall eat bread,  
Until you return to the ground,  
from which you were taken;  
For you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.

<sup>20</sup>The man gave his wife the name "Eve," be-  
cause she was the mother of all the living.

<sup>21</sup>The LORD God made for the man and his  
wife garments of skin, with which he clothed  
them. <sup>22</sup>Then the LORD God said: See! The man  
has become like one of us, knowing good and evil!  
Now, what if he also reaches out his hand to take  
fruit from the tree of life, and eats of it and lives  
forever? <sup>23</sup>The LORD God therefore banished him  
from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from  
which he had been taken. <sup>24</sup>He expelled the man,  
stationing the cherubim and the fiery revolving  
sword east of the garden of Eden, to guard the  
way to the tree of life.

The divine question in verse 9, "Where are you?" underscores the tragic rupture of the divine-human relationship caused by human efforts to usurp divine power. The sin is thus in crossing the boundary that God set for them. They attempt to go beyond the limits of humanity and usurp power that belongs only to God.

The Lord God punishes all three: snake, woman, and man. Of the three, the words to the woman are the fewest, and she is not accused of committing the first sin. That idea does not appear in the Bible until Sirach 25:24: "With a woman sin had a beginning, / and because of her we all die." The punishments are etiologies that explain such human questions as "Why are women and men attracted to each other?" "Why do some people try to dominate others?" "Why do we wear clothes?" "Why is childbirth painful?" "Why is work difficult?" "Why do snakes crawl on the ground?" "Why do we die?" Finally, the divine words recall the second creation story, in which God fashioned the human being from the ground, and reminds Adam that he will return to the earth from which he came. Immediately after hearing this, the man names his wife Eve. Naming her is an act of domination, and at the same time the name he gives her acknowledges the mutuality between man and woman, announcing the beginning of motherhood and Eve's role as the first mother, illustrating the complexity of human relationships.

God punishes the couple, but does not abandon them. Immediately after announcing the punishment, God arranges for their needs by providing clothes for them. In covering their nakedness, God removes their shame. This act of compassion establishes a precedent for what follows repeatedly throughout the Old Testament: when humans violate the terms of the divine-human relationship God finds a way to restore the balance by providing for the needs of the people.

**EXPLORING LESSON ONE**

1. What are your hopes and expectations as you begin studying Genesis?

---

---

---

---

2. Identify some key events in your life that you would label as “beginnings.”

---

---

---

---

3. List the three important themes of Genesis indicated by the commentary Introduction.

---

---

---

---

---

4. What do we mean when we say that ancient writers were more concerned about meaning than details?

---

---

---

---

---

5. How do the fourth, fifth, and sixth days of creation (1:14-31) complement the first, second, and third days of creation (1:3-13)?

---

---

---

---

---

*Lesson One*

6. When are you most keenly aware of the goodness of God's creation (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31)? (See Pss 8:4-10; 19:1-4; 33:6; Jer 32:17; Rom 1:19-20.)

---

---

---

---

7. What responsibilities are implied by the gift of our dominion over creation (1:26; 2:15)?

---

---

---

---

8. How would you explain the importance of humans being created in the image of God (1:26-27)? (See 9:6; 1 John 4:20.)

---

---

---

---

9. What changes in the human condition does Genesis 3:16-19 indicate are a result of the couple's disobedience?

---

---

---

---

10. How is God's care and concern for humans shown to continue even after their sin (3:21)?

---

---

---

---



## CLOSING PRAYER

### *Prayer*

*God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good. (Gen 1:31)*

In your generosity, O God, you created all that is and looked upon it with love. Instill in us this same loving gaze as we look upon the created world. When we are tempted to take for granted any person or living thing, remind us of the goodness of each thing you created. We pray for those who need to be reminded of their goodness, especially . . .