A detailed painting of a tropical landscape. In the foreground, there are various plants, including palm trees and a bird of paradise flower with a vibrant orange and red bloom. The middle ground shows a body of water, possibly a lagoon or a river, surrounded by dense greenery. The background features a bright blue sky with soft, white clouds. The overall style is that of a classical oil painting.

GENESIS



From
Creation
to a
Nation



KEN FLEMING

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Creation
to a
Nation



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Emmaus College Press

Genesis: From Creation to a Nation
Ken Fleming

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ISBN 1-59387-012-4

First Edition 2005

Published by:
Emmaus College Press
(A Division of ECS Ministries)
P.O. Box 1028
Dubuque, IA 52004-1028
www.ecsministries.org

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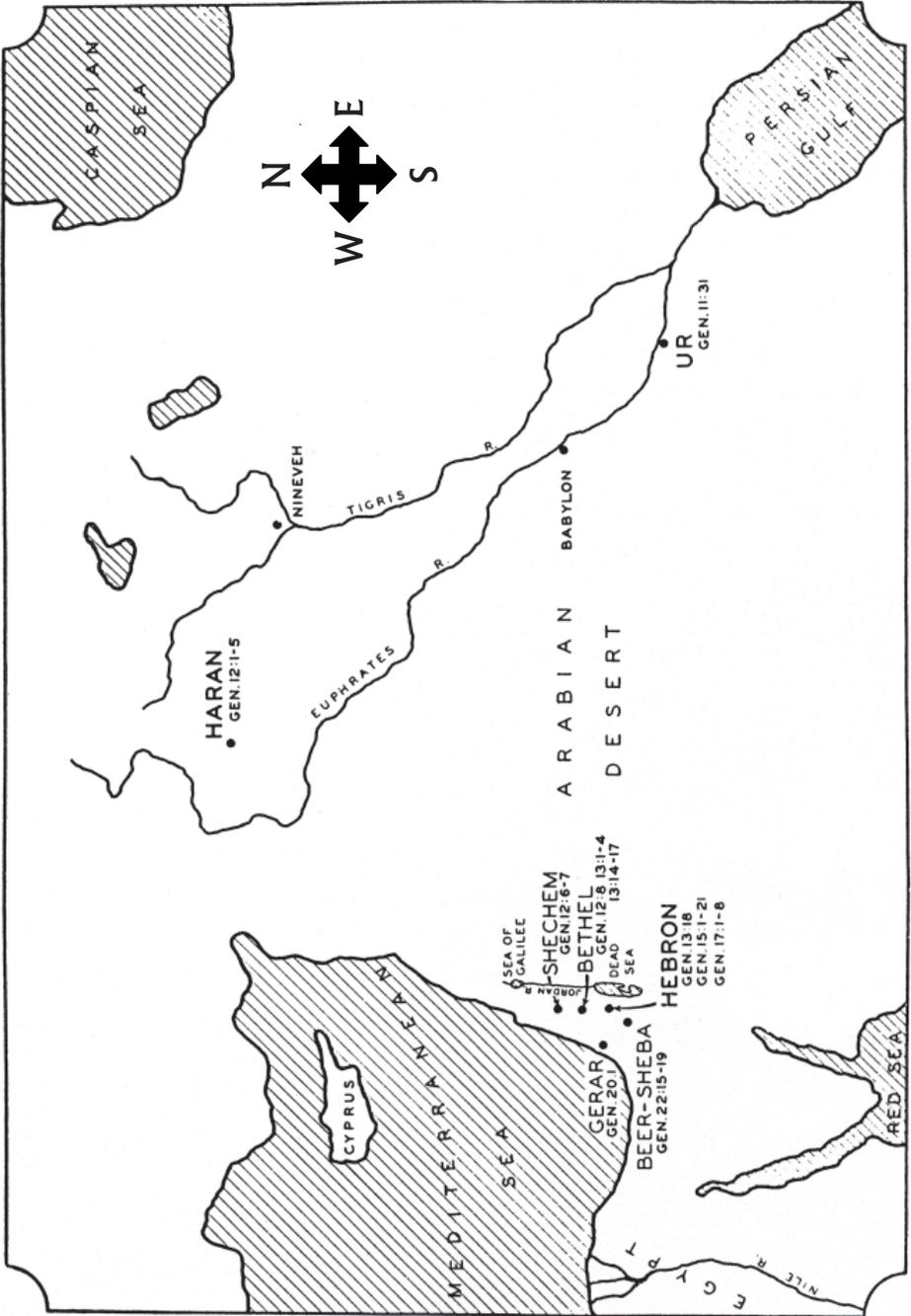
Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Introduction	9
<u>Chapter</u>	
1. The Creation	15
2. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden	29
3. The Tragedy of Sin and the Triumph of Grace	43
4. The Rebellion of Ancient Civilization	59
5. The Patriarchs, From Adam to Noah	73
6. Noah and the Ark	85
7. The Worldwide Flood	97
8. Leaving the Ark	103
9. God's Covenant with Noah	111
10. Ancient Nations and Their Dispersion	121
11. The Tower of Babel	127
12. The Call of Abram	137
13. The Choices of Abram and Lot	149
14. The Blessings of Victory	157
15. The Covenant with Abram Ratified	165
16. The Birth of Ishmael	173
17. The Pledge and Sign of the Covenant	179
18. God's Promise and Abraham's Prayer	187
19. The Deliverance of Lot from Sodom	195
20. Abraham and Abimelech	203
21. The Fulfillment of the Promise	209
22. The Test of Abraham's Faith	219
23. The Death and Burial of Sarah	131
24. A Bride for Isaac	235
25. Abraham's Death and the Birth of Esau and Jacob	245
26. Isaac and Abimelech	255
27. Jacob Obtains the Patriarchal Blessing	263

Contents

28.	Jacob's Dream at Bethel	273
29.	Jacob's Marriages in Haran	281
30.	Jacob's Children and Jacob's Prosperity	291
31.	Jacob's Flight from Haran	299
32.	Jacob's Wrestling with the Angel	309
33.	Jacob's Return to the Land	317
34.	Treachery in Shechem	323
35.	The Renewal of the Covenant at Bethel	329
36.	The Family of Esau	337
37.	Joseph's Dreams and Betrayal	341
38.	The Family of Judah	349
39.	Joseph in the House of Potiphar	355
40.	Joseph in Prison	363
41.	Pharaoh's Dreams and Joseph's Exaltation	369
42.	Joseph's Brothers' Journey to Egypt	377
43.	Joseph's Brothers Return to Egypt	383
44.	The Testing and Confession of Judah	389
45.	The Reconciliation of Joseph with His Brothers	395
46.	Israel's Journey to Egypt	403
47.	Jacob Blesses Pharaoh	409
48.	Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons	415
49.	Jacob Prophecies Concerning His Sons	423
50.	The Deaths of Jacob and Joseph	435



Introduction

The Importance of the Book of Genesis

God's revelation to man begins with the book of Genesis, which means that the importance of Genesis for us can hardly be overstated. It contains the truth about the origin of all things and is the key to understanding all that has happened in the subsequent history of the world. But more than that, it provides a foundation for all the great truth about God and His ways that are progressively revealed in the Bible. Genesis helps us to understand the meaning of history, and in particular, of God's purposes that are being worked out, especially in His relationship to people.

Genesis is important for us because it answers many of life's biggest questions. Where did we come from? Why are we here? What is the nature of man? What is wrong with our world? What is our future, and the future of the world?

Because it is foundational to our understanding of God's truth, Genesis is *a book of theology*. It records the creation of all things, especially the formation of planet Earth and the early history of its people. It spans the first 3000 years of human history, from the creation of Adam to the death of Joseph. In this sense, it is *a book of history*. Finally, it is a book full of narrative about people in their relationships with God and with one other. It is, therefore, *a book of insight* into human life and relations.

All the other books of the Old Testament are closely connected with the book of Genesis as the history of God's people unfolds. In referring to Genesis the way they do, they clearly show that it is not a collection of folk tales but the history of real people and events. The first great people of Genesis are called *ancients*, such as Adam and Noah (chapters 1-11).

After the Flood, the key characters are termed *patriarchs*. They were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the latter being referred to in twenty of the Old Testament books and eleven of the New. The descendants of the patriarchs formed the nation Israel, whose very existence would be inexplicable without the Genesis record.

In the New Testament there are more than two hundred quotations or references to Genesis. Interestingly, more than one hundred of them refer to passages in the first eleven chapters—the chapters most under attack by skeptics.

Every one of these references treats Genesis as an actual historical record, so we can be confident that the record is true.

The word *genesis* means “beginnings” or “origins.” It is a fitting title because the book reveals the origin of the universe with its galaxies and solar systems. It describes the beginning of all life forms and human life in particular. We learn also the beginnings of man’s relationship with God and the origin of evil. We find there the beginnings of agriculture, trade, music, cities, government, nations, and religion. And we discover how God’s chosen people, Israel, came into being and grew through the period of the patriarchs.

Moses, the Author of the Book of Genesis

The human author of Genesis was Moses, the leader of the people of Israel during their exodus from Egypt and subsequent journey and wanderings in the wilderness. The Lord Jesus Himself attributed the first five books of the Bible (which includes Genesis) to Moses. When Jesus spoke to the disciples on the Emmaus Road, it is recorded, “And beginning *at Moses* and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all *the Scriptures* the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27, emphasis added). Then later that same resurrection day, Jesus said to His disciples in the upper room, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in *the Law of Moses* and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me” (Luke 24:44, emphasis added). While there has been much controversy over the identity of the human author of Genesis by liberal scholars who do not believe in the inspiration of Scripture, conservative scholars do not doubt that it was, indeed, Moses.

The Data Moses Used to Write Genesis

How did Moses come to know the vast amount of data he recorded in Genesis? While it is true that all Scripture was given by inspiration of God, there are several ways in which the material was gathered by its human authors. One way they received it was by direct revelation from God, either audibly or visibly. Many Bible writers, such as the prophet Isaiah, heard God’s voice or saw visions. When they wrote what they heard and saw, it became part of the Holy Writings. Another way by which they received it was as witnesses, either watching something happen or from the verbal testimony of others. Moses observed the crossing of the Red Sea and we read what he saw in the book of Exodus. A third way in which revelation came was from written records of the past that were selected, edited, and arranged. The two books of Chronicles were put together in this way from court records. The Holy Spirit overruled by guiding and guarding the process so that the Scriptures were written exactly as God intended.

Regarding the data for the book of Genesis, it seems most probable that much of the material came to Moses from written records left by his forefathers.

Some of these no doubt came from sources prior to the Flood and were preserved and handed on by Noah. The godly line of Shem would have continued to preserve these records. Then, family heads added to them as they were passed from one generation to the next. Abraham would have brought them with him to Canaan. Each of the patriarchs must have recorded God's revelations to them and the major events in their lives. When Jacob moved to Egypt, he would have brought them with him. In Egypt, Joseph would likely have collected all available historical material and established family archives during the years of the embryonic nation's development there.

With the fulfillment of God's original promises still in process, it would have been extremely important for His people to have in their possession all the ancient records. These would probably have been in the form of clay tablets. Moses, with his clear understanding of God's purpose for the emerging nation to return to the Promised Land, would have had them close to hand when the time came. He would also have had the oral family history passed down from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and Levi. Using his intellectual capacity and the educational training he received in Egypt, Moses compiled and edited the narratives to compile the book of Genesis under the infallible direction of the Spirit of God.

Circumstances Surrounding the Writing of Genesis

Genesis was most probably written after Moses led the two million Hebrews out of Egypt while they were journeying in the wilderness. He was God's chosen man to lead the people of Israel to the Promised Land. Their departure from Egypt was the most dramatic historical event since the scattering of the nations at Babel. It began when God sent ten significant plagues on Egypt, climaxing with the death of all the firstborn who were not protected by the blood of the Passover sacrifice. The Israelites then escaped from Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and turned around to watch the destruction of Pharaoh's army beneath the waves (Exodus 3-15). This event was followed by their journey to Mount Sinai and God's dramatic presentation of the Ten Commandments there, most likely around 1445 BC (Exodus 16-20).

Their wilderness experience was a critical point in the history of the people of Israel. Their Egyptian enemies were destroyed, but many other enemies and three hundred miles of wilderness stood between them and the land that had been promised them. For the Israelites, the most severe tests were still to come. They needed confirmation that the God who had led them out into the wilderness would be with them and would fulfill His promises to bring them safely to the Promised Land. They needed encouragement to face the trials that would come, like hunger, thirst, and military attack. For the next thirty-eight years until they reached Canaan, desert life presented many challenges, both to two million restless and impatient people and to Moses' ability to lead them.

Moses' Reasons for Writing

In all probability, therefore, Moses had the needs of the Israelites in mind when he wrote the five books of the Law, of which Genesis is the first. The public reading of Genesis to the Israelites in the wilderness would have had a huge impact on them in several ways.

First, it would confirm in their minds that the God of creation was greater than the Egyptian gods that they had seen defeated at the Red Sea (Exodus 14-15). He was greater than the gods of the Amalekites, demonstrated by their early victory over them (Exodus 17:8-13). They could be confident that He would help them to victory over other hostile peoples through whom they must pass and over the Canaanite nations in the future as well.

Second, it would confirm that God was accomplishing His own purpose in history by forming them, as Abraham's descendants, into a nation. They could experience the events of their developing nationhood as part the fulfillment of God's promises.

Third, it would confirm the promises God had made with Adam, Noah, and Abraham. When they saw the initial promises about the nation being fulfilled before their eyes, they would be assured that God would faithfully fulfill the remainder. The covenant promises looked forward to a coming Messiah who would triumph over Satan and save His people. Ultimately, all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). When the Israelites learned the Genesis story, especially of their own destiny according to God's covenant, they were to take courage and put their trust in God.

The Structure of Genesis

Genesis is best seen as arranged around the repeated use of the key phrase "These are the generations of" (sometimes translated slightly differently) which Moses used to introduce the section that followed. The sections are often called the *toledoth* sections because the Hebrew word for "generations" is *toledoth*. Thus, the section beginning "This is the *toledoth* of Adam" (5:10) means that a new section is beginning which explains what became of Adam. The phrase occurs eleven times beginning with its use in Genesis 2:4 (see also 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 11:27, 25:12, 25:19, 36:1, 36:9, and 37:2).

The first chapter records the creation of the heavens and the earth, laying the foundation for the eleven divisions, making twelve well-defined sections in all. For the most part, the eleven divisions mark a new beginning in the narrative. They then show the effect of sin on what God had designed, followed by a demonstration of God's grace that gave new hope for the future. The twelve sections are carefully designed to develop the basic theme of Genesis, that is, the creation of God's world and the formation of a nation within it through which all other nations would be blessed.

The Profit in Understanding Genesis

You will be greatly rewarded by understanding what God reveals in the book of Genesis. The rest of God's Word will come alive as you connect the patriarchs in Genesis with the ongoing story that emerges out of what God began through them. You will grasp the significance of many avenues of history that start in Genesis and flow through the Exodus from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, the rise and fall of Israel's monarchy, and that nation's exile into Mesopotamia. The story will culminate in the New Testament narrative of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, the growth of the early church, and the hope of Christ's return to rule.

A study of Genesis will make doctrinal truths come alive as well. You will be introduced to themes such as God's holiness, the tragic effects of sin on the whole world, the promise of redemption and the blood sacrifices that foreshadowed it, and the coming of Jesus Christ the Redeemer and the prophecies that foretold it. You will learn of the character of the Triune God, His ways of revealing Himself to man, and His intervention in man's affairs.

The third facet of the Bible that will come alive to you in Genesis is how it mirrors human experience in our failures and successes, in our struggles to overcome the effects of sin, and in our daily walk with God by faith. In these ways, a serious study of Genesis will touch our minds, our hearts, and our actions.

The Toledoth Sections Of Genesis

- Prologue Creation of the heavens and the earth (1:1 – 2:3)
1. What became of the heavens and the earth (2:4 – 4:26)
 2. What became of Adam (5:1 – 6:8)
 3. What became of Noah (6:9 – 9:29)
 4. What became of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1 – 11:9)
 5. What became of Shem (11:10 – 26)
 6. What became of Terah (11:27 – 25:11)
 7. What became of Ishmael (25:12 – 18)
 8. What became of Isaac (25:19 – 35:29)
 9. What became of Esau (36:1 – 8)
 10. What became of Esau - part 2 (36:9 – 37:1)
 11. What became of Jacob (37:2 – 50:26)

The Creation

The book of Genesis contains God's first revelation to us. In Genesis, we learn the beginning of God's major purposes in relation to people and the early development of those purposes. Chapter 1 is an introduction to Genesis. It explains how everything in the world of time and space came into being. We are to understand it as an historical account of how God created the universe in seven days. God wants us to know that it was not by mere chance that the universe came into existence, but by His infinite wisdom and almighty power. More specifically, chapter 1 focuses on the origin of our planet with all its physical features and life forms. Finally, and most importantly, it explains the origin of man. Knowing how man came into being is vitally important, because we cannot properly understand our destiny unless we first understand our origins. Genesis begins with a comprehensive statement about the origin of all things. The first verse contains only ten words and is simple in form, yet it is majestic and profound in its meaning and significance. Think of it! "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (v. 1). The foundation of all the truth that God has revealed in the Bible is in this verse. Every word and phrase is significant. We will look at them one by one.

In The Beginning, God (v. 1)

The primary focus is on God, who is both the Creator and Origin of everything else that exists. Before anything existed, God was there. He is eternal. He is identified by the name *God*. In the original Hebrew the word is *Elohim*, a plural name that indicates His sovereign majesty. A few commentators have suggested that the plurality of the name is connected with the triune nature of God. However that may be, the main point is that the one true God, *Elohim*, is revealed as the omniscient and omnipotent Creator of the universe, whose majestic name complements His awesome power.

"In the beginning" is the time notation, referring to the time when God first acted to create the universe that is described in the rest of the chapter. Prior to this point, nothing material existed. Only God was there. The Psalmist says, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Ps. 90:2). Although we can be confident that it was God who originated all creation,

there is no indication anywhere in the Bible as to when the beginning of creation took place.

Theories about the Age of the Earth

There are two major theories among believers as to when “the beginning” was. Many are of the opinion that the earth and the universe are very old, perhaps as old as four billion years. Their belief is called the *old earth theory*. Some old earth theorists think that earth and its life forms were created perfect at that time and subsequently suffered a catastrophe which left it in chaos. They believe that out of that chaos, God, at a much later date, formed the world as we know it. Other old earth theorists believe that God created the whole universe at a very early date by means of natural processes. After the original creation of matter, the formation of stars and planets took place naturally, over time, and life forms appeared and became increasingly complex by the process of evolution. They link the days of creation in Genesis chapter 1 with the periods of this extended evolutionary process. However, the radio metric methods of dating that they use are quite unreliable and based on unproved assumptions. The fossil record is also unreliable and does not support the theory of the evolution of biological life.

Many other evangelicals accept the theory of a *young earth* which, they assert, was created no more than ten thousand years ago. They do not see any break between the first two verses in Genesis. They believe that God specifically created life forms as we know them within a literal seven-day period, and they reject the theory of evolution. Although they are aware that the shortened time duration of this theory is at variance with most modern scientific opinion, they base their understanding on a literal interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2. They are also encouraged by much scientific exploration. Discoveries have been made in the last fifty years that provide enormous amounts of geological evidence in many different parts of the world to substantiate their view of a young earth. The idea is also consistent with the accurate and full genealogical evidence in the Bible. The author of this study believes that Genesis 1 is best understood in the light of the young earth theory, taking the Word of God literally. The reader should carefully consider the evidence and be ready to answer inevitable questions in this area (1 Pet. 3:15).

Two clear passages of Scripture may help. The first is the statement of God to Moses included in the Ten Commandments. “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day” (Ex. 20:11). Moses (the writer of Genesis) and the children of Israel whom he was addressing at Sinai would certainly have understood that everything that exists was made in those six literal days. The second passage is a statement made by the Lord Jesus Christ that, before the creation week in which God made man, there was no other (that is, former) creation. He said, “From the *beginning* of creation, God made them male and female” (Mark

10:6, emphasis added). The fact that the Lord referred to man's creation on the sixth day as "the beginning of creation" does not leave room for the days of creation week to be geological ages.

Created the Heavens and the Earth (v. 1)

Another important word here is the verb *created*. Since nothing existed before creation, we can say that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. The word "created" is only used in the Bible in connection with God, for only God can create something out of nothing. People can make or form things from existing material, but they cannot create them from nothing. When God created, He powerfully called the universe into existence. The writer of Hebrews supports this when he said, "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Heb. 11:3). Paul, too, spoke of the God who "calls those things which do not exist as though they did" (Rom. 4:17).

The final phrase in the momentous statement of verse 1 is concerned with what God created: "the heavens and the earth." It is a common literary phrase meaning the whole universe and everything in it. Just as the expression *day and night* means "all the time," the expression *heaven and earth* stands for the whole cosmos. When the six days of creation were finished, the same phrase is used again to define everything that God had created: "This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created" (2:4).

Refuting False Ideas

The truth of the first verse in the Bible refutes a number of false ideas that have grown in the minds of men down through history. It refutes *atheism*, for it assumes the existence of God. It refutes *polytheism*, for the verb "created" is singular, indicating that the Hebrews believed in one God. It refutes *materialism*, which teaches that matter is eternal. Matter cannot be eternal, for God created it. It refutes *pantheism*; the idea that everything is God, for God is clearly distinct from His creation. It refutes *naturalism*, the concept that all things in existence have appeared naturally, for it teaches that God is the Creator of all that exists. Genesis 1:1 becomes for us the foundation of revealed truth. Our view of the God of creation will affect our understanding of all truth.

The Earth was without Form and Void (v. 2)

Verse 2 seems to present a stark contrast to verse 1. "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep." Notice that the focus shifts from the universe in verse 1 to the earth in verse 2, because the earth was to become the habitat for mankind, God's special creation. No other part of creation receives such attention. The condition of the earth is described as "without form and void" or "formless and empty." There is no separation or break between the first two verses. They are closely connected with the word

“And” as is properly reflected in many translations, such as the King James Version and the New American Standard Bible.

The Gap Theory

The meaning of verse 2 has been the subject of a great deal of discussion by commentators. Their debate centers on the meaning of the phrase “without form, and void.” Many have concluded that these words describe a condition of chaos which occurred in a supposed large “gap” of time between the original creation described in Genesis 1:1 and a re-creation described in Genesis 1:3-31. Proponents of the *gap theory* believe that God created the world out of a condition of chaos and darkness. They posit that after God created a perfect earth, something catastrophic happened to bring the world to a dark and formless state.

It is short step for the gap theorist to assume that if Genesis 1:2 describes chaos in the world of that time, it might have been caused by the events surrounding the fall of Satan. They link Genesis 1:2 with two biblical passages that are poetic laments over the fall of the kings of two ancient city-states, Babylon and Tyre (see Isa. 14:12-15 and Ezek. 28:12-17). Most evangelical commentators believe that, beyond the immediate reference to the contemporary kings, these passages also allude the fall of Satan. However, even if they do picture the fall of Satan, there is no indication in either passage as to when that may have occurred. Gap theorists also argue that the grammatical text in Genesis 1:2 should read “and the earth *became* [instead of “was”] formless and empty” (emphasis added). If they are correct, it would support their theory, but most textual scholars agree that there is little grammatical reason for this interpretation.

The “Not Yet” State

It seems much better to accept the text as it is written: that the earth *was* formless and empty at that time, without any suggestion that it was in a negative state of chaos due to catastrophe or divine judgment. The initial act of creation was to create the basic elements and was, as yet, incomplete. The formlessness and emptiness describe the state of transition of the earth just before God began His work to prepare it for the well being of man.

There is a connection between the words “formless and empty” and the verses that follow. Out of formlessness, God produced the *form* of geographical and geological structure of the earth; addressing the emptiness, He introduced the *fullness* of living beings to fill it. The formlessness of earth at that point might be illustrated by a lump of clay in the hands of a potter just before he begins to mold it and give it form. He might also describe it as empty, but having formed it he will also fill it, so that its purpose can be realized. “Formless and empty” depict the condition of the earth in its “not yet” or incomplete state before God called it “good.” It pictures the uninhabitable earth that God

proceeded to make habitable for man. The formlessness anticipated the future purpose of God. Isaiah the prophet used similar language to describe it: “Thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, and Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited” (Isa. 45:18). The word *vain* is the same Hebrew word as “formless” in Genesis 1:2.

Darkness Was on the Face of the Deep (v. 2)

Verse 2 goes on to say that “darkness was on the face of the deep.” Some have taken the word *darkness* to symbolize sin and to support the idea that there was an ominous and chaotic state over the world at that time. In Scripture, however, darkness does not always symbolize sin. God said, “I am the LORD and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness” (Isa. 45:6-7). Even the oft-repeated phrase in Genesis 1, “the evening and the morning,” includes the idea of darkness and does not imply an evil state. Psalm 104:20 says of God: “You make darkness, and it is night.” So the basic idea of Genesis 1:2 seems to be that the formless earth was awaiting form, the empty earth was awaiting filling, and the dark earth was awaiting illumination.

The Spirit of God “Hovering” (v. 2)

The final phrase in verse 2 is associated with the six days of creation that immediately follow. “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” Evidently the earth was entirely covered with water, and the Spirit of God was the divine agent who would accomplish the work. He is described here as “hovering over” as He participated in, energized, and protected the creation activity. We learn here, too, that more than one person of the Godhead was involved in the creation process: Job 26:13 says, “By His Spirit He adorned the heavens,” and Colossians 1:16 declares, speaking of God the Son, “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on the earth.” We have learned three important things about God in these first two verses.

- *His eternal existence*, before anything material existed, “In the beginning God.”
- *His future purpose*, anticipated in the formless and empty earth.
- *His active presence*, revealed in the reference to His Spirit.

For believers today, God’s existence, purpose, and presence are vital to our relationship with Him: we can find confidence in His eternal existence; we can find hope in His purposes for the future; and we can find encouragement from the active presence and power of His Holy Spirit.

The Seven Days of Creation

The creative acts of God took place in six remarkable days. On the seventh day He rested. If one takes the “young earth” position, all of God’s activity in

Genesis 1:1-3 would have taken place on the first day. For the purposes of outline, however, we have structured the work of the seven days of creation beginning with verse 3. The first six days are explained in a pattern of four parts. The first part of the pattern is a *creative word* from God as He commands something to appear, e.g., “Then God said, “Let there be light” (v. 3; see also verses 6, 9, 14, 20, and 24). The second part is a statement about the *immediate effect* of what God said, e.g., “And there was light” (v. 3; see also verses 7, 9, 15, 21, and 24). The third part is *God’s evaluation* that His creative act was “good” (v. 4; see also verses 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31). And the fourth part is the *ordered numbering* of each day, e.g., “So the evening and the morning were the first day” (v. 5; see also verses 8, 13, 19, 23, and 31).

Days: Literal, Symbolic, or Literary?

Before we consider the progress of each day, we need to give some thought as to whether these days were *literal days* of twenty-four hours, *symbolic days* that refer to extended ages of time, or *literary days* used as a literary device to describe creation, however it might have occurred. Because the generally-accepted theory of evolution requires millions of years for the development of species, the so-called *day-age* theory was offered as an explanation to accommodate that need. In this theory, the days of creation are viewed as successive ages of evolutionary time. However, there are strong objections that make it impossible to accept both the biblical text and the demands of evolutionary geology. Some of the major objections are as follows:

- The order of the creation days does not match the order of the fossil record in the rocks from which the day-age proponents get their theory.
- Day-age theorists teach that animals existed and died before the appearance of man. This contradicts the doctrine that death resulted as a judgment of man’s sin (Rom. 5:12).
- The days described in Genesis 1 are clearly literal days of twenty-four hours, described as they are with an evening and a morning.
- The normal understanding of Exodus 20:8-11 suggests that the sabbath twenty-four hour day was instituted on the model of the seventh twenty-four hour day of creation week. To refer to the days as simply a literary device seems unsatisfactory to this author because it does not explain what the days actually were. It sidesteps the issue by not coming to any conclusion as to whether they were literal or symbolic days.

Forming and Filling

We have already noted an interesting connection between the phrase “formless and empty” in verse 2 and the activity of the rest of the week. The first three days have to do with the creation of form and order out of the formlessness of verse 2. The second three days have to do with the creation of

fullness and harmony to rectify the emptiness. Not only is this true, but there is a striking correspondence between Days One, Two, and Three and Days Four, Five, and Six:

- Light that was created on Day One corresponds to “lights” (sun, moon, and stars) that were created on Day Four (vv. 3, 14).
- Sea and sky that were created on Day Two correspond to fish to fill the sea and birds to fill the sky on Day Five (vv. 6, 20).
- Fertile earth that was created on Day Three corresponds to animals and man with which God filled the earth on Day Six (vv. 11, 24-26).

We can see that out of the formlessness God brought about perfect order, and out of the emptiness He brought about abundant fullness. The following chart makes this plain. God’s plan was perfect then, and it is a comfort to know that He still delights in order.

The Formless Earth was Formed and the Empty Earth was Filled

Days of Forming	Days of Filling
Day 1. Light and Darkness (v. 3)	Day 4. The Sun, Moon, and Stars (v. 14)
Day 2. Sea and Sky (v. 6)	Day 5. Fish (sea) and Birds (sky) (v. 20)
Day 3. Dry Land & Fertile Earth (v. 11)	Day 6. Animals and Man (vv. 24-26)

Note several more features of the creation days. The first three are marked by a separation of some kind:

- On Day One, God separated the light from the darkness (v. 4).
- On Day Two, the waters suspended in the clouds were separated from the waters on the surface (v. 7).
- On Day Three, the surface waters (seas) were separated from the dry land (v. 9).

Then also note that both sets of three in the chart begin with light on Days One and Four and end with a double creation on Days Three and Six. So God set out to create the universe in a very orderly way, not haphazardly. Another thing worth noticing is the majesty of creation by decree. Each act of God begins with “Then God said....” God simply spoke, and it was done.

The First Day: Light Created (vv. 3-5)

“Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” These are the first recorded words of God. The original literal text is more powerful than our translation; it says something like “Light be, and light was.” We cannot explain all that is involved here or exactly what the light was. Anything beyond what is written is beyond our full understanding. This is the literal way to read the

Bible, accepting intellectually what we do understand and accepting by faith all that we do not understand. We do know that the light was visible and that it was not the light of the sun, which was created later (v. 16).

“And God saw the light, that it was good.” God saw that it was beneficial for man, who would soon be created. It may be that the earth, as yet unformed and covered with water, began to rotate on its axis with the light on one side. In that way, the light was separated from the darkness as day is separated from night. From that time, on there was a regular succession of days and nights. God divided the light from the darkness and called the light *Day* and the darkness *Night*. The word “day” indicates a period of light, but we understand the last word of verse 5 to include the evening too, incorporating the full twenty-four hour day.

Scripture emphasizes the importance of light as a symbol of spiritual light. In the writings of the apostle John, God Himself is called Light (1 John 1:5-8). John referred to Jesus as “the true Light that gives light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:9). Jesus referred to Himself as Light: “Light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). He also said, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12). Following Christ the Light keeps God’s people enlightened. Paul used this passage in Genesis to illustrate the light that God has put within the believer: “God who commanded light to shine out of darkness ... has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

The Second Day: The Firmament Dividing the Waters (vv. 6-8)

On the second day, God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters” (v. 6). Prior to this declaration, water covered the earth. It may be supposed that a thick blanket of vapor or fog rested on the water. On this day God placed a *firmament* (expanse) between the liquid water covering the earth and the water that was “above the firmament.” Thus there was a space between the ocean waters and the water-filled clouds above. We call this space *air*; which is essential for all living forms on earth. Some have suggested that the water above was opaque, like clouds today. Others say that it was a canopy of vapor or ice crystals that would have allowed much more light to shine through. Still others think that it might have been rings of ice crystals similar to the rings surrounding the planet Saturn. The second or third of these theories seem more plausible because both would have let light shine through.

Again, we are made aware of the division between the water below and the water above, just as there was a division between the light and the darkness in verse 4. God created the domain and then controlled it by making a division in it. How often God makes divisions and distinctions! We Christians should

also make distinctions between things that differ, as, for example, the difference between true religion and false religion (James 1:26-27).

God then named the expanse *Heaven* (v. 8). The Bible speaks of heaven in three ways:

- It is the place where the Lord Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Heb. 9:24).
- It is the space where the sun, moon, stars, and planets revolve in their orbits (Isa. 13:10).
- It is the atmosphere in which the clouds are suspended.

It is, of course, the atmospheric heaven that is referred to in Genesis 1. “So the evening and the morning were the second day” (v. 8).

The Third Day: Land, Seas, and Plants (vv. 9-13)

On the third day God said, “Let the dry land appear, and it was so” (v. 9). Again, there was an act of separation: the dry land was separated from the waters below. Landmass appeared for the first time. Nothing indicates the shape of the landmass in its original form, but it is possible that it was one large continent. We must assume that the complex makeup of rocks, minerals, geological features, and soils were all created on this day.

The Psalmist spoke of the “foundation of the earth” (Ps. 102:25) that was laid at this time. According to Genesis 10:25, the earth, or landmass, was divided in the days of Peleg. That division may have resulted in the continents similar to their form today. God called the dry land *Earth* and the gathering together of the waters He called *Seas*.

At this point the emphasis begins to shift from bringing form and order to the formless physical earth to bringing life and fullness to the empty earth. God spoke for the third time on the third day of creation: “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit” (v. 11). Each of the tens of thousands of forms of vegetation was created and grouped under the general categories of grasses, herbs, and trees. Each variety was “according to its kind” (v. 11), meaning that each was deliberately and separately created. The different kinds of vegetation did not evolve one by one from simpler forms; God created tens of thousands of species individually, all on the same day.

Within each kind of vegetation God placed the ability to reproduce itself by means of seed, according to its built-in genetic code. God created the power of fertility for all vegetation. Notice that each shrub and tree was created mature. This maturity included the appearance of age and the capacity to produce seed. If you can imagine a nurseryman planting hundreds of thousands of shrubs and trees in one day, you may have an idea of the magnitude of what God did on the third day of creation. It seems probable that there was not just one of each kind, but many.

When God had completed this task, He “saw that it was good” (v. 12). What an amazing sight it must have been, when God spoke into existence the earth’s green carpet of plants and trees!

The Fourth Day: Sun, Moon, and Stars (vv. 14-19)

On the fourth day of that momentous week God created the heavenly bodies that give light to earth. He said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens.” These included all the planets and stars. The firmament of the heavens in verse 14 is obviously not the same firmament as was created on the second day that separated the waters above from the waters below (v. 6). The firmament in verse 14 is the sphere where the moon, planets, and stars exist. We refer to it as outer space.

God cites four purposes for creating the star-filled heavens. All of them relate to people on earth. “Lights ... to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years.” First, the lights were to divide the day from the night. Again, note the separation, as there had been on the first, second, and third days (vv. 4, 6, 9). The continuing succession of days and nights make this clearly evident. Second, they were for days and years. Ever since the creation week, man has used the sun and the moon to measure time. Third, the lights would be for signs, which are marks or indications of something meaningful. For example, the plague of flies was a “sign” to Pharaoh of God’s omnipotence (Ex. 8:22-24). God said that the heavenly bodies would be meaningful signs. The fourth purpose for creating the stars was for seasons that would indicate the time for a specific thing to happen. The word is used of the appointed time when Isaac was to be born to Abraham and Sarah (cf. 17:21; 18:14; 21:2).

God created the stars and placed them where He wanted them (Ps. 8:3). He also named them (Ps. 147:4; Isa. 40:26). Since God created them for signs and seasons, it may well be that they had some significance for man in connection with His plan of salvation. There is evidence in the names of major stars and star groupings that God intended them to visually indicate His purpose regarding the suffering and glory of His Son. If so, the signs in the heavens were quickly corrupted into the pseudo-science of pagan and occult astrology.

Light itself was created on the first day, but the generators of light were created on the fourth. They were set in the expanse of the heavens. From the perspective of being viewed from earth, the “greater lights” are the sun and moon (v. 16). They are not greater in size compared with other celestial bodies—far from it—but to us on earth they are the largest and brightest heavenly bodies. The sun was to rule the day and the moon was to rule the night. Then “God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day” (vv. 18-19). No star in all the heavens was out of place. What an awesome God we have!

The Fifth Day: Birds and Fish (vv. 20-23)

By this time, all the necessary requirements to sustain life were in place. Though vegetable life was already created, conscious life (as the Hebrews viewed fish, birds, animals, and man) did not yet exist. The word “living creature” is also translated “living soul” in many places and carries the idea of conscious life.

On the fifth day, fish and birds were called into being by the direct command of God. “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures and let birds fly above the earth” (v. 20). What God did was radically different from the evolutionary idea that a stray blob of protoplasm responded to some discharge of electricity on a primeval ocean and produced life. As Psalm 33:9 says of God, “He spoke, and it was done.” When He said, “Let birds fly,” suddenly the sky teemed with thousands of varieties in all the splendor of their plumage. Just as remarkably, the sea was filled with fish of every sort, size, shape, and color.

Special attention is given to the “great sea creatures” (v. 21). These would include what we call dragons, whales, and sea monsters, most of which are extinct now. Early pagans regarded them as gods, one of which was the Canaanite god *Lotan* (Hebrew *Leviathan*). This part of the creation story would assure the Israelites in the wilderness that the great sea creatures were not gods at all. They were merely creations of the one true God. The fish and birds were created “according to their kind” with a fixed DNA program for each. This allowed for variation within the species (size, color, etc), but not for change from one species to another.

The section concludes with a blessing from God saying, “Be fruitful and multiply” (vv. 22-23). The blessing gave the Israelites in Moses’ day assurance of the perfection of all creation. Everything in nature was in balance and functioned according to a divine design.

The Sixth Day: Animals and Man (vv. 24-31)

God spoke on the sixth day saying, “Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth” (v. 24). These three categories of living creatures (literally “living souls,” as in verse 20) were to inhabit the land. The term *cattle* probably equates to domestic animals, *creeping things*, to small animals, insects, small reptiles, and the like, and *beasts*, to wild animals. They were all made simultaneously as is evident from the fact that the three categories are listed in opposite order in verses 24 and 25.

God was pleased and satisfied with His animal creation and declared it to be “good” (v. 25). Now, at last, the earth and its environment were ready for *people*.

“All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small.
 All things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all.
 Each little flower that opens, each little bird that sings,
 He made their glowing colors, He made their tiny wings....
 He gave us eyes to see them, and lips that we might tell
 How great is God Almighty, Who has made all things well.”

– C. F. Alexander

The Creation of Human Beings (vv. 26–31)

The climax of the narrative toward which the whole chapter is leading is the creation of man. God made humans very different from animals, and He treats their creation in much more detail and with considerably more emphasis. Notice God’s personal involvement in verse 26: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man.’” Contrast this with the less personal description of the creation of animals in verse 24 where He said, “Let the earth bring forth the living creature.” God took special interest in people.

Notice, also, the phrase “Let Us make man,” which has both a plural pronoun and a plural verb. The use of plurals has been taken by some to mean that there was more than one God at work, or that God worked together with angels in the creative process. These ideas are clearly wrong. It is best to understand that these plurals were used in Hebrew to indicate the majesty of God, just as we noted the use of the plural word for God in Genesis 1:1. It is possible that there may also be a hint of the triune God in the plurals, but they mainly point to the majesty of God.

In the language in verse 26, it does seem as if the members of the Godhead were communicating with one another. However, the development of the great truth of the Trinity will only be fully unfolded in the New Testament. Here, perhaps, we see it in seed form.

Man Created in the Image of God

Three times the text states that man, unlike other creatures, was made in the image of God (vv. 26-27). God specially designed man to reflect His own spiritual nature. Just as Roman coins were stamped with Caesar’s image, so the image of God was “stamped” on man. This means that human beings, unlike animals, share some of God’s attributes. These attributes include truth, wisdom, love, holiness, justice, personality, and symbolic speech. God gave man moral sensitivity, conscience, and the ability to think abstractly. Man, because he is created in the image of God, is a thinking being, a moral being, and a dignified being. Unlike animals, man is composed of soul and spirit as well as body. God made man with the capacity for loving Him, for worshipping Him, and for spiritual fellowship with Him.

God's Purposes in Creating Man (vv. 26-28)

The next thing we learn is that God's purpose in creating man was to make him ruler over creation. Humans were to have "dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Two verses later, man is told to "subdue it," indicating that he was to gain mastery over the earth and explore its secrets.

In addition, man was given the capacity to produce life and, in doing so, to imitate God who created life. Note that God created only two kinds of people in relation to sexuality: male and female. When it says "God created man," the word *man* is a generic term referring to both male and female. The word "man" is properly translated in this way hundreds of times in Scripture. We should not let the modern pressure for political correctness and inclusive language rob us of its proper use.

God instructed the man and the woman saying, "Be fruitful and multiply." This was part of their blessing from God. In Genesis, to be blessed means to be enriched and to be fertile. However, the bearing of children is not only a blessing—it is also a tremendous responsibility. A man and a woman are capable of producing a living soul. In bearing children, parents share in God's work of creating life. It is worth mentioning that God's command to be fruitful has not been rescinded.

Instructions Concerning Food (vv. 29-31)

God continued to speak to the man and the woman He had made, telling them that their food was to be "every herb that yields seed . . . and every tree whose fruit yields seed." From these verses we conclude that before sin entered into the world, both man and animals were vegetarian in diet. Later, after the Flood, God modified His instructions to include the eating of meat (9:3), but in the beginning it was not so. We are not told when animals began to have fangs and claws and to eat other animals. Perhaps it was part of the curse.

Finally, at the conclusion of the sixth day, God saw "everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good." Isaac Watts, the great hymn writer, expresses this sentiment in "I sing the mighty power of God":

I sing the goodness of the Lord that filled the earth with food,
 He formed the creatures with His Word and then pronounced them good.
 Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed, wher'ere I turn my eye,
 If I survey the ground I tread or gaze upon the sky.

In Conclusion

God had spoken, and it was done. The world He created was perfect, filled with innumerable plants and trees with their flowers and fruit. Above and within the vegetation, the thousands of varieties of birds sang and soared. Among

them and under them, the fantastic variety of animals and insects roamed. Among all these creatures, God placed one pair of human beings who could understand some of the eternal wisdom that had brought it all into being.

For the believer, to consider the creative acts of God described in the first chapter of Genesis is to understand something of the omnipotence of the Mighty God. From nothing, He brought into being the heavens and the earth. From formlessness, He brought about His perfect design and form. From emptiness, He filled the seas with fish, the sky with birds, and the land with creatures of every description. The Psalmist was right in saying, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Ps. 19:1). He crowned His handiwork with the creation of man, made in His image, and declared it all “very good.”

Whether we try to comprehend the enormity of the whole animal creation or the complexity of one tiny ant, we should respond in worship to God for His creative wisdom and power. Like the twenty-four elders in heaven we can say, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (Rev. 4:11).

Understanding Genesis is key to understanding the subsequent history of mankind. In this easy-to-read, verse-by-verse devotional commentary, Ken Fleming does just that — he helps us understand Genesis.

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KEN FLEMING has been an enthusiastic and passionate Bible teacher for more than fifty years. His service for Christ has led him to many parts of the globe, including South Africa, where he spent twenty-five years as a missionary among the Zulu people. From 1977 through 2002, Ken taught in the Bible and Missions programs at Emmaus Bible College in Dubuque, Iowa. Today he continues proclaiming the gospel and strengthening the church body through writing and preaching ministries.

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The Word to the World

EMMAUS COLLEGE PRESS

ISBN 1-59387-012-4



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