

# In the Beginning

## Genesis 1–2

### 1 Scouting the Terrain

Most of us know that the first two chapters of the Bible tell the story of how God created the heavens and earth. God created everything—blah, blah, blah—and that’s the basic point, right? *Wrong*. Because we’re so familiar with the story of Adam and Eve and how God made the world in seven days, it’s easy to skim over the details of these first two chapters. Therefore, we miss a whole lot of important information about who God is; what type of attitude we should have about work; how God initially encouraged us to eat; and what some of the very first gifts were from God to us, such as the ability to be creative. The list of what these two chapters can tell us is almost endless. For example, do you know that there are two different stories attributed to two different authors about how God created the world? Do you know that God created the day to start in the evening and not in the morning and that the first thing God created wasn’t light but chaos?

#### Trailblazers

- God
- Adam
- Eve

These initial chapters of the Bible reveal God’s creative love and imagination and God’s invitation to men and women to help continue to create God’s world. In the first Creation story, God speaks the world into being. God’s word commands life into existence. The earth and the waters and all of the vegetation and animals were created before humans were. Creating man and woman

together was God’s finishing touch and the only part of Creation made in God’s image. The second Creation story is where we first read about God creating Adam and Eve. God forms man out of the dust and breathes new life into being. Then God plants a garden as humankind’s first home.

- What have you made that you were very proud of? What motivated you to make it?
- Have you ever handcrafted a Christmas or birthday gift for somebody? Whom? How did he or she react? How did that reaction make you feel?

### 2 NOW READ GENESIS 1–2.

### 3 Switchback

As you were reading through Genesis 1, did you notice the recurring phrase, “And God saw that it was good”? When God creates something, it is done so purposefully and whatever is created comes out exactly the way God desires. God looks at every aspect of Creation, sees it for what it is, and calls it good.

God thinks that human beings need one another to live faithfully and joyfully in God’s created world. So God made Eve to be a partner and a helper to Adam, not to serve him as an unequal creation, but so that the two could be in community together, supporting and helping each other.

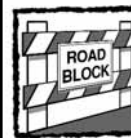
- Which Creation story do you like better? Why?
- In light of the fact that you were created by God, lovingly and on purpose, what, do you think, does God think of you?
- What does it mean to be made in the image of God?

#### Pace Pusher

Did you notice that when God speaks of creating humans in God’s image, God uses the plural possessive *our*? (Genesis 1:26). Flip in your Bible to the Gospel of John, in the New Testament; and read John 1:1-18.

### 4 Prayer

*Dear God, thank you for making us in your image. Teach us what that means, and help us treat others as though they are made in your image as well. Amen.*



As you read through the Creation account in Genesis, you may be scratching your head, thinking that the order of things just doesn’t add up. In Chapter 1, God creates land animals and human beings on the sixth day.

In Chapter 2, we read that God creates humans first then land animals. What’s going on here? We have been taught that dinosaurs existed for millions of years before the first humans. How can this be?

Well first, don’t forget that the Bible says that God doesn’t measure time the same way we do (2 Peter 3:8). Also the Bible isn’t trying to be a schematic or a step-by-step set of instructions on how to create the world. The Bible’s purpose isn’t really to tell us *how* God created the world but *that* God created the world and everything in it, including you, lovingly and on purpose.

# Noah and the Ark

## Genesis 6–9

WEEK  
1  
DAY  
3

### 1 Scouting the Terrain

As humanity continues in violence and rebels against God’s plan for Creation, we see more of God’s emotions. God grieves, is deeply saddened at humanity’s violence, and regrets having made humans. Remember that we are made in God’s image, so we shouldn’t be surprised that God has feelings and emotions. Still, it’s surprising to imagine God having regrets, isn’t it? God didn’t create people to be robots, programmed to do everything God commands. God created humans with hearts and the freedom to make choices, and God desires that people choose to be in relationship with God. But as we saw from the garden, humans tend to use their freedom the wrong way. God’s sadness and regrets are a result of our human choices to hurt one another and to hurt our environment. But if God loves us, why would God destroy us? When we think about the story of the flood, we wonder how God could be so cruel as to destroy the whole earth—even the people who may have been innocent and the animals that had never hurt anyone. But Genesis 6:12 says, “All flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth.” Have you ever thought that, instead

**What three examples from days 1–3 point to God’s mercy in judgment? Then go to [amazingbible.com](http://amazingbible.com) to take a short quiz to check your research.**

- Trailblazers**
- God
  - Noah
  - Shem
  - Ham
  - Japheth

- of focusing on how harsh a judgment it was for God to destroy the earth, there is something more to learn about God from the fact God spared Noah, Noah’s family, and some animals—like mercy?
- God could have totally destroyed humanity but decided to save it through Noah. What does that say about how God feels about us?
  - Noah was a farmer and not a carpenter, shipbuilder, or engineer. What does that say about the people God calls on to accomplish God’s work?

### 2 NOW READ GENESIS 6–9.

### 3 Switchback

Maybe you’re starting to see a pattern of divine action. When humans sin, God judges our sin; and there are consequences. Yet, from the biblical stories we’ve read so far, God always seems to show mercy, even when our behavior doesn’t deserve it.

God remembers Noah and blesses him with a second chance. God’s blessing is an invitation for humans to reclaim their freedom and dominion in God’s created world. And God even extends human boundaries by allowing them now to eat meat. The freedom God gives us is unique because it is a freedom that binds us to a certain way of life and to honor God and all God’s creation.

- God sets the rainbow in the sky as a sign of the covenant God made with Noah. Who or what else was included in the covenant?
- What does Noah do first after leaving the ark? Have you ever paused to give thanks to God after coming out of a very hard time?
- The Scripture says that God spared Noah because he was the only one righteous before God. What phrase appears repeatedly in today’s reading that emphasizes Noah’s relationship with God?

### Road Signs

- **Nephilim (NEF-uh-lim):** These are giants born from the intermingling of human females and divine male creatures. Such unions symbolized increasing chaos on earth.
- **Cypress wood:** This is a slow-growing, coniferous tree that is extremely resistant to decay and insects; it can be more than 100-feet high or a simple shrub.
- **Pitch:** This natural adhesive in the form of a gummy, black substance is extracted from trees.
- **Cubit:** This is an ancient measuring term. One cubit equals the distance from the elbow to the tip of one’s middle finger.

### 4 Prayer

*Merciful God, you see and know the innermost parts of our hearts. Forgive us when our thoughts and actions cause you to grieve in your own heart. And help us use our freedom to care for people and the natural world. Amen.*



**2** NOW READ  
GENESIS 12-15.

**Abram and Sarai**  
Genesis 12-15


**1** Scouting the Terrain

- Trailblazers**
- God
  - Abram
  - Sarai
  - Lot

The most significant thing we know about Abram up till now is that his wife, Sarai, can't have children. Who will care for Abram and Sarai in their old age? Who will continue Noah's family line and the repopulation of the Earth? Haran, his brother, is already dead; and at the end of Chapter 11, we are left with the bleak picture of a dwindling family with a newly deceased grandfather Terah.

Then God enters the scene with a word, a call, and a promise for new life and a new future. The call of Abram is God giving humanity yet another chance at living faithfully by God's standards. Through Abram God seeks to create a new people, a new nation, and an even more intense level of interaction between humanity and God. To begin this new relationship with God, Abram must learn to let go of the life he knew and trust God's word. God asks Abram to give up three sets of things: his sense of home and belonging, his community and family, and his comfort and stability. No one ever said obeying God was easy. Sometimes following God is not about being safe, secure, and comfortable, but about taking risks and starting new journeys. How does Abram respond? The Bible doesn't say anything about complaints or bargaining with God. Instead, it says, "Abram went, as the LORD had told him." Abram chose to blindly trust God.

- Whom do you know who you would say is a faithful follower of God?
- Do you know someone who has given up much in pursuit of God's will?
- Why, do you think, was Abram so quick to respond to God's requests?

**fast**  **forward**

Walk a labyrinth and reflect on a time when you felt that being faithful to God meant being uncomfortable, scared, and uncertain about the future. What sorts of things, thoughts, or people helped you make a decision? (Be sure to photograph or video your group in the labyrinth to upload at [amazingbiblerace.com](http://amazingbiblerace.com). Or post a blog reflection about the experience, instead.)

**3** Switchback

Abram left his home, as God asked. And while that was a faithful move, he has already acted very human by making Sarai pose as his sister, potentially putting her in danger, just to save his own skin from Pharaoh. So when God appears again, Abram is less willing to obey without question. He points out the obvious to God, "What will you give me, for I continue childless?" and simply questions God's ability to do all that God promises, regardless of the circumstances. God's reply is a reminder to Abram, and us as the readers, that when God promises to provide, we should never imagine that it will be second best. Abram's child will be of his own flesh and blood. With that issue settled, Abram now wants proof that God will also keep the promise about giving him some land. So God, who never has to prove anything to us, willingly enters into an old-fashioned contract with Abram. Yet this covenant with Abram was more like a gift than a contract. Abram doesn't have to do anything to receive all that God has now promised him, or does he?

- What is it about Abram and Sarai's life that makes them think that God's promises sound especially ridiculous? Do you suppose they believed that these promises would come true?

**Road Signs**

- **Covenant:** This is an agreement between two parties. The ancient custom of making a covenant was to cut animals in half and then have each group or person from both sides of the agreement walk through the animals. This was a way of saying that if either party didn't keep their end of the bargain they were willing to become like the dead, halved animals.
- **Canaanites** (KAY-nuh-nights): These are people of Canaan, from whom God would take their land and give it to the Hebrew people as their Promised Land. Today Canaan covers parts of Israel and Lebanon.
- **Bethel:** This is a town located on the road to Jerusalem.
- **Pharaoh:** (FAYR-oh): This is the Hebrew word for the king of Egypt.
- **Sodom** (SOD-uhm): Where Lot chose to live, Sodom is famous for being the sinful city where people had no regard for God and were hostile to strangers.

**4** Prayer

*Generous God, you offer us so many blessings. All you ask in return is our faith. Give us faith enough to let you interrupt our comfortable lives with your new visions and plans. Help us go and trust as easily as Abram did. Amen.*

