

# HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN?

As a small boy, I remember looking at the moon, planets, and stars at night and wondering: “How did all of this begin?” “How did the earth come into existence?” “How did humans get here?” These are not “childish” questions. Geniuses have grappled with the question of origins for centuries. Scientists today still speculate about how it all began. Periodically a spokesman for the American space program will say something like, “with this flight, we shall gain more information and insight into the origin of the universe.”

Those who know the Lord believe the answers are in Genesis 1, but biblical scholars are not agreed about exactly what Genesis 1 is saying. Some say there is a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. Others counter, “There is a gap in the gap theory.” Some claim the days of Genesis 1 are literal 24-hour days. Others contend the days are long periods of time. Some believe that man evolved and, at the appropriate moment, he was made in God’s image. Others reject evolution and teach direct creation.

How did it all begin? Was there a big bang? Did it happen a long, long time ago or relatively recently? Was man created, or did he evolve? How did all this get started?

Genesis 1:1-2:3 records the creation and formation of the heavens and the earth. This portion of Scripture, which forms the introduction to the book of Genesis and, for that matter, the whole Bible, mainly consists of a description of what happen in seven days. The first day does not begin, however, until verse 3. Therefore, verses 1 and 2 are an introduction. Of the seven days, God only works the first six. So the last day could be called a conclusion. Thus, the seven days of Genesis 1:1-2:3 can be summarized in three parts: 1) introduction (1:1-2), 2) a description of God’s work in six days (1:3-31), and 3) conclusion, the Sabbath of God (2:1-3).

This chapter will deal with the introduction and the question of how it all began. Later chapters will deal with the rest of Genesis 1 and the other questions related to origin.

## The Introduction: God Created the Universe

The Bible begins with the simple yet sublime statement, **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (1:1)**. The beginning here is not the beginning of all things; it is the beginning of the creation of the cosmos (Constable). The Bible does not offer arguments for the existence of God. It assumes His existence!

In English grammar, a word can either be singular or plural, but in Hebrew, a word may be singular, dual, or plural. The Hebrew word for “God” is plural. Most Commentators say the plural signifies the majesty of God (Ross). While the Trinity may not be explicitly revealed in the plural, it could be implied. Ryrie says the plural indicates majesty, but it allows “for the NT revelation of the triunity of the Godhead.” The rest of Genesis 1:1 sounds simple on the surface, yet there are three interpretations of it and the next verse.

*The Traditional View (original creation alone)* The Traditional view is that Genesis 1:1 is a statement and verse 2 consists of three circumstantial clauses describing the conditions of the earth when it was first created. The classic Hebrew grammars concur that verse 2 contains circumstantial clauses and the majority of the commentators, both Jewish and Christian, claim that this view is the correct interpretation of these verses. It is a declaration of fact, that is, the act of God of creating the universe (Keil; Leupold; Ryrie). Constable says it is a “topic sentence that introduces the whole creation account that follows” (see also Bush, Young; Waltke; Ross).

*The Gap Theory (original creation and recreation)* The gap theory teaches that Genesis 1:1 is an independent coordinate clause describing the original creation. There is a gap between verses 1 and 2. Verse 2 reveals what happened sometime after the original creation of verse 1. According to this view, the word “was” should be translated “became” and “without form and void” as well as “darkness” are terms of judgment. Elsewhere the expression “without form” is used in an evil sense. The only two other places in the Bible where the phrase “without form and void” occurs, namely in Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23, are passages that speak of judgment. Therefore, between verses 1 and 2 there was an indeterminate period of time during which Satan fell. Thus, the earth is very old and verses 3-31 describe the recreation of the earth (*The Scofield Reference Bible*; C. S. Lewis; M. R. De Haan; Barnhouse).

Constable points out that the gap theory is very old. He says some early Jewish writers and church fathers held it. In 1814, Thomas Chalmers promoted it, not to harmonize Scripture with science, but Scripture with Scripture (Darwin’s *Origin of Species* first appeared in 1859).

*An Alternative Explanation (recreation only)* An alternative explanation teaches that Genesis 1:1 is not original creation (the traditional view), nor does it describe creation and recreation (the gap theory). It is a record of recreation and nothing more. Some within this camp claim Genesis 1:1 is an independent clause, while others contend that it is a dependent temporal clause. They all insist that the grammar of verse 2 will not allow for a gap between verses 1 and 2. Verse 1, therefore, is translated “when God began to create.” In other words, Genesis 1 begins with chaos (1:2) and describes the recreation (Waltke). If asked where the chaos came from, they will answer that it is not within the purpose of Genesis to answer that question (Ross). Thus, Genesis 1 says nothing about the original creation; it only describes recreation.

Which of the three interpretations is correct? The gap theory lacks conclusive contextual proof. “Was” is used 264 times in the Pentateuch and is translated “was” not “became” 258 of those times. Only six times is this Hebrew word rendered “became” in the writings of Moses. Granted, it *could* be translated either way, but there is nothing in the context of Genesis 1 to *require* that it be translated “become.” No English version has ever translated this Hebrew verb “become.” Furthermore, the clearest way to convey the concept of a change of state in Hebrew would be to follow this verb with the preposition “to” as is done in the Hebrew of Genesis 2:7 (“and man became a living being”), but that construction does not occur in Genesis 1:2. “Without form and void” simply means formless and empty. “Without form” does not always refer to something evil (see Job 26:7 where it is translated “empty space”). Granted, the context of Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23 is judgment, but even in those passages, the meaning of “empty and uninhabited” fits well. The result of the judgment was the land is empty, but that was good, not evil, because the evil was removed (Lk. 8:35; Mt. 12:4). Nor does “darkness” demand an interpretation of evil. God created darkness (Ps. 104:20). In Genesis 1, the evening involved darkness and it is pronounced “good” (1:31; etc.). Be all of that as it may, there is nothing in the context of Genesis 1 to require that verse 2 is describing judgment. Constable says that although “many evangelicals still hold the gap theory, few Hebrew scholars do because the Hebrew grammar does not favor a chronologically sequential reading of verses 1 and 2.

The alternative explanation is not convincing. While those who hold to that position insist that the grammar of the passage requires it, not all Hebrew scholars agree. Most disagree! Besides, somehow it just doesn’t seem right that Genesis 1 says nothing at all about the original creation.

The traditional view that Genesis 1:1-2 is describing the original creation of the material universe, which was first created unformed and uninhabited, is the correct interpretation. The objection that said God did not create the earth “without form” (see Isaiah 45:18 where “without form” is rendered “vain”) is not valid because Isaiah goes on to say that God formed it to be inhabited. Isaiah’s point is that God did not create the earth in vain but that His ultimate intent was that the earth be inhabited with people. The last clause of Isaiah 45:18 shows that this passage is talking about the *purpose* of creation, not the *state* of it. Also, Exodus 20:11 supports the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1:1. It says the Lord made the heaven and the earth, the sea and all that is in them in six days.

Assuming the traditional view, Genesis 1 begins with the absolute beginning of the created material universe. Heaven and earth, the material universe, have not existed from all eternity but had a beginning. God, not matter, is eternal. Matter was made (Heb. 11:3). Theologians call this *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), a Latin expression that means God did not use any preexisting materials when He created the universe. The universe no more came into being by change than did your car!

Moreover, God did it out of nothing. The distinguished astrophysicist Professor Hannes Alfvén of the Swedish Institute of Technology, Stockholm, once stated that the Book of Genesis should start, “In the beginning, there was an original cloud, magnetized and perhaps a light-year (six trillion miles) in diameter.” How could he possibly know that?

Two men — Joe and Charlie were arguing about Genesis 1:1. Joe said he believed the record of creation just as it was written. Charlie, an unbeliever, went to great length in giving his theory of how the world began and developed from a primordial cell through reptiles, monkeys, and up to humans. When he was all through, Joe looked at him and said, “Were you there, Charlie?” Charlie replied, “Of course I was not there.” Joe replied, “Well, God was there. He was the only one there and I’ll take the word of the eyewitness.”

Since God created the universe out of nothing, He is absolutely sovereign over all matter; He created it and, therefore, has the right to it, as an author has the copyright over His work.

## **Description: Originally, it was Unformed and Uninhabited**

The “heavens” mentioned in verse 1 are not considered in verse 2; only the earth is discussed. Genesis 1:2 describes the earth when it was originally created.

*Without Form and Void* “The earth was without form and void” (1:2a). The phrase “without form and void” indicates that originally the earth was lacking in form and lacking in content. It was unformed and uninhabited. It was a formless, lifeless mass. The earth had to be shaped and peopled before it could be declared “good.” The remainder of the chapter shows how God formed the earth (1:3-13) and inhabited it with living things (1:14-31).

Senator Warner of Virginia, who at one time was married to Elizabeth Taylor, tells of a doctor, an engineer, and a politician discussing which of their professions was the oldest. The doctor said that his was because it would have taken a doctor to remove Adam’s rib and fashion a woman from it. The engineer argued, “An engineer was required to make order out of chaos.” The politician said, “But it took a politician to create the chaos.”

*Darkness* “and darkness was on the face of the deep” (1:2b). The Hebrew word translated “deep” means “to roar, to rage” and here denotes raging waters, as is apparent from the next clause where the word “waters” is substituted for it. The material mass called the earth was covered with surging water and wrapped in darkness.

*The Spirit of God* “and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (1:2c). The Spirit of God is not the wind of God or the power of God; He is the Holy Spirit. As Constable points out, in the Old Testament, the Spirit is identified as God (2 Kings 2:9; Ps. 104:30; Ezek. 3:12-14; 11:1; Zech. 4:6; Ross; Morris). The Holy Spirit was “hovering” over the water-covered planet. The word rendered “hovering” means “to flutter, fly.” It is used in Deuteronomy 32:11 of an eagle fluttering over its young. In a similar fashion, the earth was under the care of the Spirit of God, who was posed for its future development.

God created the earth like a potter fashions a vase. The potter begins by placing a lump of clay on his wheel to mold it as he wills. Likewise, God created a lump of raw material of the earth with a view to giving it shape. At first, it was unformed and uninhabited. At this point, the earth was like a block of marble waiting for the sculptor’s creative touch.

**Summary:** God created the material universe, but originally the earth was unformed and uninhabited.

In light of the overall purpose of Genesis, the point of this passage is that the Creator of the universe is the God who made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Either the universe just happened, or God created it. Some, of course, insist that it all just happened. The other possible answer is that God created the heavens and the earth, which is the view of Genesis 1. God chose to create and God alone created. That means He created everything and everything belongs to Him. He is sovereign. As the Psalmist says, “The earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it, upon the seas, and established it upon the waters” (Ps. 24:1-2).

If that is true, it eliminates a number of other theories.

1. Atheism because God does exist.
2. Pantheism because God is distinct from creation.
3. Polytheism because one God created the universe.
4. Materialism (matter is eternal) because matter was created.
5. Dualism because God alone created everything.
6. Humanism because God, not man, is the ultimate reality.
7. Fatalism because of personal God created the world.

If this is true and we believe it, it is easy to believe everything else in the Bible. The first four words of the Bible “form the foundation for faith. Believe these words, and you can believe all that follows in the Bible” (MacDonald). If God is powerful enough to create the world, He could part the Red Sea, create a fish big enough for Jonah to live in it three days and nights, and make a virgin pregnant.

If that is true, all humans are accountable to Him.

And it is true! “Dr. A. Cressy Morrison, former president of the New York Academy of Sciences, said it is possible to demonstrate that the universe could not have just happened. Design demands a ‘Master Mind.’ The earth rotates on its axis at 1,000 miles per hour. If it rotated at only 100 miles per hour, our days and nights would be ten times as long as they are now, and the earth would alternatively burn and freeze. Under such circumstances, vegetation could not live. The sun has a surface temperature of 12,000 degrees Fahrenheit and the earth is at the exact distance necessary to get just enough heat and yet not too much. The earth is tilted 23 degrees. If it were not tilted at this angle, vapors from the ocean would move north and south, piling up continents of ice. If the moon were not at the exact distance it is from the earth, the ocean tides would inundate the landmass completely twice a day. If the ocean were just a few feet deeper than it is, the carbon dioxide and oxygen in the earth’s atmosphere would be completely absorbed and no

vegetable life could exist on earth. If the earth's atmosphere were just a little thinner, many of the meteors that are now burned out in space would bombard us, setting great fires everywhere. Did this delicate balance just happen? Not a chance in ten million!" (*Our Daily Bread*, November 8, 1958).

Sir Isaac Newton had a model of the solar system. At its center was a large gold ball representing the sun. Revolving around it were smaller spheres attached at the ends of rods of varying lengths. These smaller balls represented the other planets. The model was constructed in such a way that the planets moved around the "sun" in perfect harmony. Newton had a friend who did not believe in the biblical account of creation. One day as he was marveling at the model, the friend asked, "My, Newton, What an exquisite thing! Who made it for you?" Without looking up, Sir Isaac replied, "Nobody."

"Nobody?" his friend asked. "That's right! I said nobody. All of these balls and cogs and belts and gears just happened to come together and wonder of wonder by chance they began revolving in their set orbits with perfect timing." Newton was a deeply spiritual man as well as a scientist. He knew both from scientific reasoning and Scriptural revelation that the universe could no more just happen than a model could just appear.