

Visual Commentary:

Genesis 1

SCRIPT REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

0:00-0:27

Jon: The first book in the Bible is called Genesis.

Tim: And we're going to look closely at the first page of the book of Genesis. It's a carefully crafted narrative about God creating and ordering the whole cosmos.

Jon: Okay. Let's check it out. Now, the opening line of the whole Bible is: "In the beginning God created the skies and the land."¹

HEAVEN AND EARTH

0:28-1:19

Tim: Now, your Bible translation might say, "the heavens and the earth." In biblical Hebrew, the word for "heaven" refers simply to the sky above. And the word for "earth" does not mean "globe" but rather, "the land."

Jon: The ground below us.

Tim: Right. This line is summarizing what's going to happen in the following narrative, which starts in the next line.

Jon: And it reads: "Now the land was wild and waste..."²

1. Genesis 1:1

2. Genesis 1:2

Tim: This phrase rhymes in Hebrew. “The land was *tohu vavohu*,” which means, “unordered and uninhabited.” This is the ancient way of talking about the pre-creation state, what we might call “nothingness.” For the biblical authors, non-existence means having no purpose and no order. And the next line uses another image to say the same thing.

Jon: “And darkness was on the face of the deep abyss.” ³

THE CHAOTIC WATERS

1:20-2:24

Jon: What’s the “deep abyss?”

Tim: Yeah. It’s a dark, chaotic ocean. It’s another common way the ancients described the non-reality that preceded creation. Now, here’s where things start to get interesting. Because in the midst of those dark waters, God is present.

Jon: “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” ⁴

Tim: The Hebrew word for God’s Spirit is *ruakh*, which can refer to wind, or breath, or God’s invisible presence.

Jon: So you can’t see it, but God is present in the darkness, ready to bring order so that life can flourish.

Tim: Yes. And this ordering happens in a series of six days.

Jon: Each day begins with the phrase, “and God said,” and then ends with the phrase, “and there was evening and morning.”

Tim: Yeah. Every day addresses those problems introduced in verse 2—that there’s no order and no inhabitants. So on days one through three, God splits apart that unordered darkness into three ordered realms. Then on days four through six, God fills the uninhabited wasteland with creatures.

Jon: Interesting. Let’s see how that works.

Tim: Okay, so the first realm of order begins with light on day one.

Jon: Ah yes. "Let there be light."⁵

Tim: This is God's own glorious light that fills and contains the darkness as he separates day from night. God's establishing the order of time.

Jon: Okay, and then on day two: "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water."⁶ What's "the vault?"

Tim: In the ancient culture of the biblical authors, the sky was perceived as a solid dome that holds back waters. God's depicted here as splitting the chaos waters in half, above and below, which creates the realms of the sky and the seas.

Jon: And then on day three: "Let the waters under the sky be gathered into one place, and let dry ground appear."⁷

Tim: God is establishing the realm of the land, and it emerges out of the chaotic waters. And then there's a bonus creative act on day three. God invites plants and fruit trees with seed to emerge out of the land.⁸

Jon: Okay, so we've got the realms of time, the realm of the skies and the seas, and the land. And they all have order.

5. Genesis 1:3

6. Genesis 1:6

7. Genesis 1:9

8. Genesis 1:11

Tim: Right. Now it's time to go back and fill these realms of days one through three with inhabitants. This is what happens on days four through six.

Jon: So on day four: "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky."⁹

Tim: God installs these lights—the sun, moon, and stars—as signs and symbols that reflect God's own light. He gives them his own royal power to separate day and night.¹⁰

Jon: Then on day five: "Let the waters swarm with living creatures, and let birds fly above the land."¹¹

Tim: Yeah. These are the creatures that live in the waters below and those that fly near the waters above.

Jon: Then finally on day six: "Let the land produce living creatures."¹²

Tim: They emerge up out of the ground to live on the land. And then, matching that bonus act of creation on day three, God makes a special land creature: human, or in Hebrew, *'adam*.¹³ Then God provides all of those plants from day three as abundant food.¹⁴

Jon: Now, over and over, God says what he created was "good." But then, after making humans, God says that it is "very good."¹⁵

Tim: Yes. Humanity is the climax of days one through six, and their importance is explained in the first poem in the Bible.¹⁶

9. Genesis 1:14

10. Genesis 1:15-16

11. Genesis 1:20

12. Genesis 1:24

13. Genesis 1:27

14. Genesis 1:29

15. Genesis 1:31

16. Genesis 3:14-19

Jon: "So God created humanity in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."¹⁷

Tim: So humans come up from the ground, like the other land creatures, but they're also more. They're God's image, which means that, together, men and women embody and represent the Creator within his creation.

Jon: "God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it, ruling over the creatures.'"¹⁸

Tim: This is the purpose of being God's image, to oversee creation as God's partners and representatives in the world.

Jon: Very cool!

Tim: Now, after the six days, we get a concluding line that links back to the key words of the opening line.

Jon: "And so were completed the skies and the land and all their inhabitants."¹⁹

Tim: Except, there's one more day. It stands outside the pattern of days one through six. It's the big climax!

Jon: "And God completed on the seventh day the work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work which he had done. And God blessed the seventh day and set it apart as holy."²⁰

17. Genesis 1:27

18. Genesis 1:28

19. Genesis 2:1

20. Genesis 2:2-3

Tim: So God rests on the seventh day. This is a standard biblical image, where God, after ordering the cosmos, comes to rest and dwell in his sacred space. It's like the whole world is a holy temple where God lives with his people.

Jon: Now that phrase, "there was evening and morning," it doesn't appear on day seven.

Tim: That's right. The seventh day has no end. That's because Genesis 1 is describing God's ideal vision for the whole cosmos.

Jon: A place where God lives with his partners to rule the world in harmony forever.

CREATION'S PURPOSE

6:26-7:19

Tim: Yes! The seventh day is the goal of creation. It's actually so important that the author of Genesis 1 has woven the number seven into every part of the story. They're seven days of creation, seven announcements that creation is "good." There are seven Hebrew words in the opening verse, and then two-times-seven Hebrew words in verse 2. And then the statement about the seventh day has three lines of seven words.

Jon: Wow. So the first page in the Bible is doing way more than just telling us how the world was made.

Tim: Right. Genesis 1 has been designed to show us that God's purpose is to share creation with his images, so they can rest and rule it with him forever. And that purpose is what the rest of the biblical drama is all about.