

# WONDER

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“So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female.”

—Genesis 1:27, TEV

## 2 The Creating God

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### OUR HUMAN CONDITION

I wonder who made me and my world. If there is a Creator, what is this Creator like? Why was I made? Geologists point to rocks that are billions of years old. Astronomers speak of stars that are millions of light years away. In a universe so big, surely I am only a speck of dust.

### ASSIGNMENT

Especially read Genesis 1–2 and the psalms aloud. This week’s preparation is designed for celebration and praise and to establish the habit of daily study and devotion. Find a hymnal for reading or singing the suggested hymns.

- Day 1 Genesis 1:1–2:3 (Creation)  
Hymn: “Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee”
- Day 2 Genesis 2:4–25 (second Creation story);  
Psalm 8 (praise to the Creator)  
Hymn: “For the Beauty of the Earth”
- Day 3 Psalms 19:1–6; 33 (God’s glory and greatness) Hymn: “All Creatures of Our God and King”
- Day 4 Job 38–39 (God’s mystery and majesty);  
40:15–41:34 (God’s power)  
Hymn: “This is My Father’s World”
- Day 5 Psalms 104; 150 (praise); John 1:1–5 (the Word) Hymn: “How Great Thou Art”
- Day 6 Read and respond to “The Bible Teaching” and “Marks of Discipleship.”  
Hymn: “When Morning Gilds the Skies”
- Day 7 Rest, reflection, prayer, and praise.

### PRAYER

Pray daily before study:

“You created me, and you keep me safe;  
give me understanding, so that I may learn  
your laws” (Psalm 119:73, TEV).

Prayer concerns for this week:

# WONDER

Day 1 Genesis 1:1-2:3 (Creation)

Day 4 Job 38-39 (God's mystery and majesty);  
40:15-41:34 (God's power)

Day 2 Genesis 2:4-25 (second Creation story);  
Psalm 8 (praise to the Creator)

Day 5 Psalms 104; 150 (praise); John 1:1-5 (the  
Word)

Day 3 Psalms 19:1-6; 33 (God's glory and great-  
ness)

Day 6 "The Bible Teaching" and "Marks of  
Discipleship"

# DISCIPLE

## THE BIBLE TEACHING

The Hebrew verb for *create* refers to the activity of God, not to human activity (Genesis 1:1). Two ideas are contained in the verb *create*. First, God freely, purposefully creates order out of chaos. Second, God arranges and designs that creation.

“The heavens and the earth” means the immeasurable universe, all that was or is or ever will be.

“The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep” (1:2) refers to a cosmic emptiness, a formless darkness, sometimes referred to as a “sea of chaos.” The ancients believed that all creation originated from a dark, watery chaos, “the deep.” Look up Psalm 24:1-2. “A wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Other translations for “swept over” could be “hovered,” “soared,” or “trembled.”

The Hebrews did not believe that the Creator was simply one of a group of gods. They did not believe that two gods, one good and one evil, battled to bring creation into existence. Rather, they believed that the one and only Lord of the universe, the One who had created them to be a covenant people and who had delivered them from slavery, was Author and Designer of all that is.

### What Is God Like?

Then God *spoke*. The universe was created by a *word* (Genesis 1:3). Jews and Christians are not pantheists. We do not believe that God and the universe are one. We are not a part of the great universal Spirit, the way a drop of water is a part of an ocean. No, a separateness exists between God and the created order. God spoke, and order came into being. God stands apart yet involved. God stays close, in contact with that creation.

Later when Jesus Christ came, Christians understood that in him the Word had become a human being. “Word” became a synonym for Jesus Christ. John had Genesis 1:3 in mind when he wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things came into being through him. . . .

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:1-14). By God’s word the universe came into being. Later that Word walked among us.

The apostle Paul also wanted people to know that the Word God spoke in Creation was the same Word God spoke on the cross. “For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible. . . . For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, . . . by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:16-20). Thus Christians have come to perceive the Creation story.

## NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

## Wonder

From the beginning, people have pondered the mystery of Creation. Why am I here? Where did the universe come from? Little children ask, Who made God?

Giraffes and elephants amuse us; the Rocky Mountains and the Milky Way amaze us; a newborn baby fills us with wonder. With the psalmist we ask,

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” (Psalm 8:4).

We can only respond with wonder as we listen in as God confronts Job (Job 38–41). Those four chapters lay before our eyes the order, majesty, and mystery of Creation. They sing of the glory, goodness, and power of the Creator.

Recognize that for our purposes in this lesson, we are lifting this jewel from its setting in Job in order to observe the mighty drama in Creation. In Job, as you will see in a later lesson, faith and suffering are the issue, and these chapters record God’s response to Job’s questioning God’s purpose and rule.

But the point of Job for us here is

- that the wonders of God’s creation are beyond the grasp of our minds;
- that human understanding and divine understanding are vastly different;
- that our power and God’s power cannot be compared;
- that human values and God’s values are worlds apart;
- and above all else, that this Creator cares, that is, loves the creation.

What response shall we make? Only wonder. Only praise.

The Bible does not try to prove the existence of God.

Rather, the Bible explodes in praise of God’s creative power. The Bible answers the questions of the heart by celebrating God’s creativity and pointing toward human response.

Not a scientific account of some “big bang” theory, not a newspaper reporter’s interview with Adam and Eve, the Bible portrays a vibrant creation and a loving and gracious God.

## Creation

*Genesis* is a Greek word that means “beginning,” “origin.” The opening Creation account (Genesis 1:1–2:3) is a carefully worded poem of praise to God, containing the accumulated faith of the covenant people.

The second account (2:4–25), and the older of the two, is a very ancient story, told long ago around campfires, under a star-studded sky. It was recited by one generation to another for centuries before it was written down.

The Creation psalms are songs of worship that spanned the centuries and are as comfortable for us today as they were for ancient Israel. These psalms chant songs of beauty and order and wonder.

# DISCIPLE

The assignment urges us to read the Creation passages aloud. Why? In reading the precise poem, the earthy story, and the majestic psalms, we will hear the sounds and feel the cadence. Meaning will come to us through our ears as well as through our eyes.

The Jews, who have lived with Genesis for a long time, are amazed that Christians want to literalize the poetry. To take the imagery of the “first day” or “second day” as twenty-four-hour periods or to look for the bones of Adam in Mesopotamia is to miss the essential point. Even to interpret the days as eons or ages, comparing them to certain geological time frames, is to turn a faith statement into a scientific text.

The symbol of seven days is a faith statement. It implies progressive creativity and careful order. In understanding “the first day,” “the second day,” and so on, we need to remember that

“a thousand years in your sight  
are like yesterday when it is past,  
or like a watch in the night” (Psalm 90:4).

But more, seven days are poetic symbols to show form and to remind us to order our lives as God has ordered the universe.

Some people have trouble with science and the Bible. They either say the Bible is not true, or they separate their study of science from their faith as if God does not understand how mountains are formed or how babies are born. But have you wondered why so many scientists are women and men of faith? Because they know how much they do not know, how many questions they cannot answer except by faith. They see that the Creation stories are statements of faith, not geology or biology. They know that in Creation God acted and is continually acting to create and to bring order.

The wise father or mother responds to the child’s question, Who made God? by answering, “Nobody. That’s who God is—the One who started it all, the One who made you and me and everything.” Theologians can do no better. They say, with the Bible, that God created order and meaning and purpose out of utter chaos. In the beginning of God’s creation, “God said, ‘Let there be light’ ” (Genesis 1:3).

But what shall we think about this created universe? The biblical refrain gives us a hint: “And God saw that it was good” (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25).

Some religions, such as gnosticism, have taught that the material world is evil. The spiritual or the soul is good; the physical or the body is bad. Not so in Judaism and Christianity. Everything God made—knee joints and sex organs, flying fish and monkeys, the law of gravity and the changing seasons—is called good.

Look at the power in the Creation accounts: After mentioning that “God made the two great lights,” the sun to light the

## NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

day and the moon to light the night, the Bible flings off the infinite galaxies of the heavens in a simple phrase, "and the stars" (1:16). God is a great God!



A believer once asked a rabbi, "Why did God give us this mighty poem of Creation?" The rabbi's answer? "To teach us to rest on the sabbath." Why? Because God observed sabbath, and that makes it sacred. When we stop our work, we remember that we are God's creatures and that God will take care of us even when we rest. The loving God wants us to trust, to relax, to enjoy. If we rested, wondered, and appreciated on one day in seven, we would understand Jesus' words, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these" (Matthew 6:28-29). What an antidote for our frenzied, everyday, business-as-usual world.

Not only does the classic poem of faith tell us we belong to God; it tells us much more: We are made "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27). What do you suppose that means?

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## Stewards

"Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth'" (Genesis 1:26).

In Genesis, men and women are cocreators with God and stewards for God. Our sexuality is part of God's creative goodness, pronounced good by God's word. So we are to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (1:28). From time to time a heresy appears in the church to make sexuality sinful or dirty or evil. But "male and female he cre-

# DISCIPLE

ated them" (1:27). When persons become self-centered, that self-centeredness will affect sexual relations as well as everything else. But God's creation as such is pronounced good.

We are to be stewards of the entire universe. The biblical world was before pesticides and pollutants, but the understanding is there.

We are to keep the air clean.

We are to keep water pure.

We are to save the topsoil and replenish the forests and protect the animals. We have been given a trust to maintain the balance of nature.

Now consider the older of the two Creation stories (2:4-25). Here the order of Creation is different from the other. But like the opening Creation account, this account is a story of faith. Notice the dramatic symbols.

What do you think is the meaning of God's forming "man from the dust of the ground" (2:7)?

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What do you think the Scripture means by continuing "and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (2:7)?

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Why do you suppose some translations use "the man" in 2:23 and others use "Adam"? Look up *Adam*.

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What does Eden symbolize to you?

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What do you suppose is the symbolic significance of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (2:9)?

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We might ask a rabbi, "Why did God give us the story of man and woman?" (2:18-25). The rabbi might answer, "God gave us this story to show that marriage is rooted in Creation. Marriage is God's plan, one flesh, and should not be vio-

## NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

lated." As Jesus said in Matthew 19:3-12, "What God has joined together, let no one separate" (19:6).

## MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP

We are God's creatures. As Christian disciples, we know we belong to God. God has claim on us. How do you show in the way you live that you belong to God?

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Describe a time when you felt such wonder at the majesty of creation that you could only praise God.

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If God created the world for our benefit, what does that say about the character of God?

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Clearly, the Creation stories give us responsibility for caring for the earth, for plants and animals, birds and fish, air and water. Read again Psalm 8:6-9. What are you doing right now to exercise this stewardship of all creation?

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Describe your day of rest. How does it reflect a quiet trust in the great, good, and loving God who has created you and who will sustain you? How could you rest more creatively on your sabbath?

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## IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE

Study further the meaning and use of the word *Word* in John 1:1-5. What is the relationship of this Word to the creative action of God?

Take a walk outdoors. Be aware of the sky, the trees, the water. Take time to watch and listen and feel. Try to see something you have never seen before. From time to time say, "Thank you, God."

## NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

*Disciples know they belong to God, that God has claim on them.*