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Introduction

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

Welcome to the conversation! The Bible study resources you are using are created to support the bold vision of the Book of Faith initiative that calls “the whole church to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered, and sent by the Word.”

Simply put, this initiative and these resources invite you to “Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.”

We enter into this conversation based on the promise that exploring the Bible deeply with others opens us to God working in and through us. God’s Word is life changing, church changing, and world changing. Lutheran approaches to Scripture provide a fruitful foundation for connecting Bible, life, and faith.

A Session Overview

Each session is divided into the following four key sections. The amount of time spent in each section may vary based on choices you make. The core Learner Session Guide is designed for 50 minutes. A session can be expanded to as much as 90 minutes by using the Bonus Activities that appear in the Leader Session Guide.

• Gather (10-15 minutes)

Time to check in, make introductions, review homework assignments, share an opening prayer, and use the Focus Activity to introduce learners to the Session Focus.

• Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

The session Scripture text is read using a variety of methods and activities. Learners are asked to respond to a few general questions. As leader, you may want to capture initial thoughts or questions on paper for later review.

• Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

Learners explore the session Scripture text through core questions and activities that cover each of the four perspectives (see diagram on p. 6). The core Learner Session Guide material may be expanded through use of the Bonus Activities provided in the Leader Session Guide. Each session ends with a brief Wrap-Up and prayer.

• Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)

Lists homework assignments, including next week’s session Scripture text. The leader may choose one or more items to assign for all. Each session also includes additional Enrichment options and may include For Further Reading suggestions.

A Method to Guide the Conversation

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies has three primary goals:

- To increase biblical fluency;
- To encourage and facilitate informed small group conversation based on God’s Word; and
- To renew and empower us to carry out God’s mission for the sake of the world.

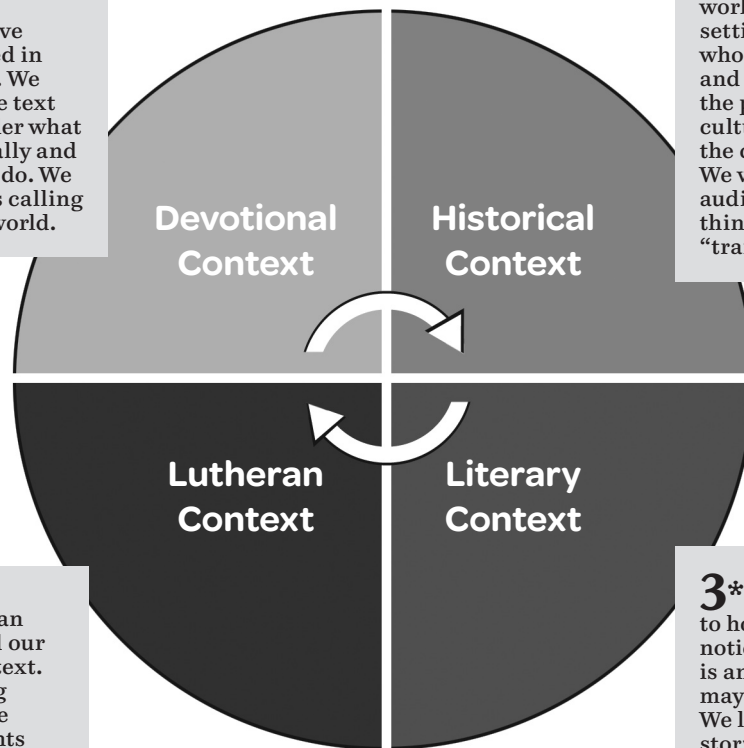
To accomplish these goals, each session will explore one or more primary Bible texts from four different angles and contexts—historical, literary, Lutheran, and devotional. These particular ways of exploring a text are not new, but used in combination they provide a full understanding of and experience with the text.

Complementing this approach is a commitment to engaging participants in active, learner-orientated Bible conversations. The resources call for prepared leaders to facilitate learner discovery, discussion, and activity. Active learning and frequent engagement with Scripture will lead to greater biblical fluency and encourage active faith.

1 We begin by reading the Bible text and reflecting on its meaning. We ask questions and identify items that are unclear. We bring our unique background and experience to the Bible, and the Bible meets us where we are.

5 We return to where we started, but now we have explored and experienced the Bible text from four different dimensions. We are ready to move into the “for” dimension. We have opened Scripture and joined in conversation for a purpose. We consider the meaning of the text for faithful living. We wonder what God is calling us (individually and as communities of faith) to do. We consider how God’s Word is calling us to do God’s work in the world.

2* We seek to understand the world of the Bible and locate the setting of the text. We explore who may have written the text and why. We seek to understand the particular social and cultural contexts that influenced the content and the message. We wonder who the original audience may have been. We think about how these things “translate” to our world today.



4 We consider the Lutheran principles that help ground our interpretation of the Bible text. We ask questions that bring those principles and unique Lutheran theological insights into conversation with the text. We discover how our Lutheran insights can ground and focus our understanding and shape our faithful response to the text.

3* We pay close attention to how the text is written. We notice what kind of literature it is and how this type of literature may function or may be used. We look at the characters, the story line, and the themes. We compare and contrast these with our own understanding and experience of life. In this interchange, we discover meaning.

*** Sessions may begin with either Historical Context or Literary Context.**

The diagram on p. 6 summarizes the general way this method is intended to work. A more detailed introduction to the method used in Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies is available in *Opening the Book of Faith* (Augsburg Fortress, 2008).

The Learner Session Guide

The Learner Session Guide content is built on the four sections (see p. 5). The content included in the main “Join the Conversation” section is considered to be the core material needed to explore the session Scripture text. Each session includes a Focus Image that is used as part of an activity or question somewhere within the core session. Other visuals (maps, charts, photographs, and illustrations) may be included to help enhance the learner’s experience with the text and its key concepts.

For those subscribing to the Web version of Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies, the Learner Session Guides will be downloaded and printed in preparation for the session, or they may simply be projected for groups that decide to be paperless.

The Leader Session Guide

For easy reference, the Leader Session Guide contains all the content included in the Learner Session Guide and more. The elements that are unique to the Leader Session Guide are the following:

- **Before You Begin**—Helpful tips to use as you prepare to lead the session.
- **Session Overview**—Contains detailed description of key themes and content covered in each of the four contexts (Historical, Literary, Lutheran, Devotional). Core questions and activities in the Learner Session Guide are intended to emerge directly from this Session Overview. Highlighted parts of the Session Overview provide a kind of “quick prep” for those wanting to do an initial scan of the key session themes and content.
- **Key Definitions**—Key terms or concepts that appear in the Session Overview may be illustrated or defined.
- **Facilitator’s Prayer**—To help the leader center on the session theme and leadership task.

- **Bonus Activities**—Optional activities included in each of the four sections of “Join the Conversation” used by the leader to expand the core session.
- **Tips**—A variety of helpful hints, instructions, or background content to aid leadership facilitation.
- **Looking Ahead**—Reminders to the leader about preparation for the upcoming session.

Session Prep Video

(Available on the DVD that accompanies this unit.) To help you prepare to lead the session, Session Prep Video segments have been created. A guide will walk with you through a session overview and the key parts of the session flow. These segments can provide helpful hints, but they are not meant to replace your own deeper preparation.

Leader and Learner

In Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies, the leader’s primary task is facilitating small group conversation and activity. These conversations are built around structured learning tasks. What is a structured learning task? It is an open question or activity that engages learners with new content and the resources they need to respond. Underlying this structured dialog approach are three primary assumptions about adult learners:

- Adult learners bring with them varied experiences and the capability to do active learning tasks;
- Adult learners learn best when they are invited to be actively involved in learning; and
- Adults are more accountable and engaged when active learning tasks are used.

Simply put, the goal is fluency in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture. How does one become fluent in a new language, proficient in building houses, or skilled at hitting a baseball? By practicing and doing in a hands-on way. Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies provides the kind of hands-on Bible exploration that will produce Bible-fluent learners equipped to do God’s work in the world.

Books of Faith Series

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies includes several series and courses. This Genesis unit is part of the Books of Faith Series, which is designed to explore key themes and texts in the books of the Bible. Each book of the Bible reveals a unique story or message of faith. Many core themes, story lines, and characters are shared by several books, but each book in its own right is a book of faith. Exploring these books of faith in depth opens us to the variety and richness of God's written word for us.

Genesis Unit Overview

In Scripture, we receive a legacy of faith accumulated from generation upon generation of believers. The story begins at the very beginning, from the mists of memory, with God's Spirit moving over the waters of chaos bringing forth blessed order and a world. The book of Genesis traces our origins from these cosmic beginnings through stories preserved from pre-history. Each story captures a little more about what God's intentions are, how God acts, and who we are in relationship to God and the rest of creation.

Slowly the scope of the stories zeroes in on one family. God gives members of this family a great promise and makes a commitment to them through a covenant. Unpredictable circumstances, as well as human beings, both threaten the promise and help it to move forward. People—with all their hopes, dreams, flaws, and failings—struggle to sort out what it means to live as promise-bearers. But God acts again and again to sustain the blessing and further the promise, not as a puppeteer, but as one deeply committed to our long-term well-being. And although the course has surprising corrections and interruptions, and God's purposes seem hidden or even moving in opposite directions, God is behind and in the midst of it all, bringing the promise closer to fulfillment.

This unit uses eight questions to explore early stories of faith and God's promise in the book of Genesis.

Session 1 (Genesis 1:1—2:25) asks, "Origins: Where Do We Come From?" Early stories of faith tell about the very beginning and help us understand the relationships between our Creator, creation, and ourselves.

Session 2 (Genesis 3:1-24) asks, "Mystery and Boundary: Can We Live with God's Terms?" God creates us to be in community, but as early stories of faith continue, human behavior puts all relationships at risk.

Session 3 (Genesis 6:11-14; 7:1-5; 7:17—8:4; 9:8-17) asks, "Troubled in Paradise: How Does God Deal with Evil?" Human behavior grows increasingly destructive. God destroys the world, but provides hope in choosing one family to start over again.

Session 4 (Genesis 11:31—12:4; 17:1-8; 18:1-15) asks, "Hanging on a Promise: How Long, O Lord?" God commits to one family through covenant promises, and asks this family to trust in those promises, no matter what life may bring.

Session 5 (Genesis 21:1-8; 22:1-19; 25:19-26) asks, "How Could God Ask Such a Thing?" God asks the family that bears the promise for nearly unconditional trust, even in the face of the most difficult challenges.

Session 6 (Genesis 27:1-10, 15-17, 22-35; 32:22-32) asks, "Does God Love Just Anyone?" God continues to work in ways we wouldn't expect, through people we wouldn't expect, to carry out the promise.

Session 7 (Genesis 37:1-11, 23-36; 41:14-16, 25-36) asks, "The Future: Yours, Mine, or Ours?" The promise appears to be in jeopardy again, but God is still at work.

Session 8 (Genesis 42:1-8; 45:1-10, 25-28; 46:28-30; 49:29-33; 50:15-26) asks, "Are We Promise Bearers?" The family that bears God's promise reconciles in Egypt. These people are far from the promised land, but the story hasn't ended. God still provides and the promise continues.

Genesis 1:1—2:25



Focus Statement

From our ancient forebears in faith, we receive the stories that help us understand our Creator, and our own genesis.



Key Verse

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth . . . Genesis 1:1a



Focus Image



The Creation, James Tissot (1836-1902) © SuperStock, Inc./ SuperStock

Origins: Where Do We Come From?

Session Preparation

Before You Begin . . .

Genesis is filled with familiar stories. The learners in your group may have last considered these stories as children in Sunday school. They may not have looked at these stories as openly as we will in this session. Find a balance between digging deeper and reverencing the holy history of these stories. If learners are engaged by these texts, you have done your job!

Session Instructions

1. View the Session Prep Video.
2. Read this Leader Session Guide completely and highlight or underline any portions you wish to emphasize with the group. Note also any Bonus Activities you wish to do.
3. If you plan to do any special activities, check to see what materials you'll need, if any.
4. Try to look at all the links and reference resources you can. Even if you don't do an activity, you might be able to reference your own learning from it to deepen the learners' experience of these texts.

Session Overview

The creation stories come from deep in prehistory. They have been shaped by generations of faithful people who have sought to pass on essential truth about our origins from the well of God's imagination. These texts have inspired humans to great expressions of praise and conspired to burden and oppress. Our challenge, in an age when science is rigorous and there is simultaneously earnest spiritual hunger, is to engage these texts openly and explore their historical interpretations, eager to see God at work in our world on our behalf.

LITERARY CONTEXT

The tradition holds that Moses authored the first five books of the Bible (often called the **Pentateuch**). However, after reading chapters 1 and 2 right next to each other, we can see the possibility that more than one hand is at work. The first two chapters of Genesis were likely a collection of skillfully edited work that brought together what some have called different "**traditions.**" Some clues that this may be happening are: the names used for

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? Pentateuch:

The first five books of the Bible make up the Pentateuch. In Greek, *pente* means “five” and *teuchos* means “tool.” These books are called the Torah in the Jewish faith. The story spans Israel’s pre-history (Genesis) to just before the entrance to the promised land (Deuteronomy).

? Traditions:

Bible scholars have identified four main points of view in the telling of the stories that came together to form the first five books of the Bible and much of the history books that follow. These perspectives are based on a theory put forth by a German theologian called Wellhausen. This theory cannot be proven, but it has influenced the way many modern scholars of the Bible have described the different major sources that seem to have shaped large portions of the Old Testament narrative history.

- The Yahwist, or J, is associated with Judah and the south; it is possibly as early as the 9th century B.C.E. J refers to the God of Israel by the divine name *Yahweh* (J in German).
- The Elohist, or E, is dated slightly later than J and is associated with the northern tribes of Israel. E and P (see below) refer to Israel’s God by the Hebrew name *Elohim*.
- The Deuteronomist, or D, is basically Deuteronomy, and is connected to the reforms of King Josiah of Judah in the 7th century B.C.E.
- The Priestly source, or P, is connected with priestly class writing in the exile or post-exile. It is concerned with ritual practice and written in a formulaic style. It includes the Holiness Code, or H, in Leviticus 17–26.

God (*Elohim* or *Yahweh*), the method of creation (by word or by fashioning the earth), and the order of creation. These all differ between chapters 1 and 2.

They are different stories, and they both reveal something different about God. In the first, God is transcendent, meaning God reigns from a distance and wields great, cosmic power, reaching far beyond human experience. This transcendent God (*Elohim*) brings forth creation with a word. From nothing, there is something, and the movement from chaos to order proceeds day by day, like clockwork. Notice that the last day is a day of rest, even for God. This notion of Sabbath was and still is an important theological concept for Jews and, in turn, Christians.

In the second story, the LORD GOD (*Yahweh Elohim*) is more intimate, forming first the creature (*adam*) from the dust of the ground (*adamah*) and breathing forth the breath of life. In Hebrew, these two words are built on the same root. *Adam* is the thing made from *adamah*. *Adam* does not translate easily into English. We have grown up thinking of this word as a proper noun for someone named Adam. Some scholars have pointed out that this word bears a masculine article in the same way that, in the German language, “table” is considered masculine. It’s a convention of grammar rather than an assignment of gender.

In the story of creation in chapter 2 God is close, not far, and seems to care about the little details. In this story, the human is created almost right away. It is interesting that the power of the word is present in this story too. God invites Adam to name the creatures.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Many scholars believe these stories rose out of different historical contexts (see “Traditions” above). The “J” or Yahwist strand, represented in chapter 2 (also chapters 2–3; 4; 11:1–9), was concerned with the intimate relationship between God and the creation, and may have risen out of the struggle to claim God’s reign as more important than the human monarchy Israel embraced along the way. Notice God’s insistence on forming the creation from scratch.

Many scholars see the shadows of another strand of tradition that was probably generated at about the same time called the “E” or Elohist. The influence of this tradition will be more apparent later in Genesis.

Often called the “P” or Priestly source, the tradition in chapter 1 probably rose later, out of the time of the Babylonian exile (587–529 B.C.E.), and deals with the despair and hopelessness that came with being displaced from land and promise. It claims that humans are made in the image of God (1:26) in spite of what history seems to be saying. Notice in these verses that this creator is cosmically powerful, calling the creation into being with a mere word. Perhaps the point in its first telling was that this creator is even greater than the all-powerful conquerors who ruled over them and the gods they worshiped.

The Genesis creation stories reflect the influence of the cultures that surrounded them. Many creation and flood stories, such as *Enuma elish*) sprung from the peoples of these lands. But the people who shaped the stories of Genesis were concerned primarily with the relationship between God and the creation (including the humans) rather than the warfare that shaped the pantheon of gods worshiped in other cultures.

LUTHERAN CONTEXT

What do Lutherans believe about the creation stories?

Worldwide, there is diversity among Lutherans regarding the interpretation of the days of creation in Genesis 1. The Lutheran Confessions do not mandate the belief that God created the world in six twenty-four hour days. Many Lutherans understand that science helps us understand how God created the heavens and the earth. Whatever the case, all Lutherans are united on the confession that God created it all. According to Luther’s *Small Catechism*, to believe in “God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth” is to believe that God created everything in creation, and through God’s creation humans are given all that they need for daily living. Therefore, humans ought to “thank, praise, serve, and obey” God (From *Lutheran Study Bible*, Augsburg Fortress, p. 50).

Lutherans tend to see the authority of Scripture through lenses that can open up our appreciation of these texts in particular. Lutherans don’t demand that these creation stories function as scientific journal articles, but as statements of faith. They are a love story between God and God’s creation (including, but not exclusively, humans). Because of this, the eternal truth being expressed, that God is the source of all, is compatible with scientific ideas that we could be the result of millennia of natural selection. It’s also true that God could have created the world in seven days, complete with really cool fossils to entertain us as we learned how to find them. From the Lutheran point of view, more creation stories are better, because we get a broader view of

? Enuma elish:

A creation story from Babylon and Assyria that tells the story of how a chaotic world run by water gods was overthrown by other gods who created an orderly world and humankind.

what the great themes are. The order of creation is academically interesting more because of what it reveals about the teller than what it reveals about God.

So a Lutheran can be curious about and challenge the historical interpretation of a text in good conscience. For example, claiming that males are more important to God because they were created first, or that humans are more important than the rest of creation, are both historical interpretations of these texts that have come under study in our day. Does the rest of Scripture support these points of view about these texts? Your group will look at the principle of Scripture interprets Scripture to see how other parts of the Bible support the Genesis accounts.

DEVOTIONAL CONTEXT

If Lutherans see these chapters as a love story between God and God's creation, how does that play out in a person's life? There will be times in our lives when the transcendent God of chapter 1 will move us more—when the promise of God calling order out of chaos is just what we need. There will be other times when we need to see the divine characteristics emphasized in the second chapter—embodied in a picture of a God who is willing to get right into the messiness of life and who also gives us the dignity of being cocreators.

Both stories call us to a certain reverence, for ourselves as God's creatures, for each other, and for the creation. Encourage engagement with these texts. If we are made of the earth, and made in God's image, what does that say about our responsibility to and dependence on it? What does **dominion** look like if everything and everyone is a manifestation of God's imagination? Invite learners to question their assumptions about these stories.

Facilitator's Prayer

Before you begin leading the session, pray this prayer.

O God, creator of the universe, lead me into this session with a heart full of reverence for you, for me, for those who will learn with me today, and for the tradition of faith that has carried these stories into our day. May my own faith swell with gratitude and conviction as we study together. Bless my leadership to the same end for those who gather with me. Your love surrounds us. Amen.



Dominion:

Traditionally interpreted as “ruling over,” recent scholarship in our age of environmental stress has posed the idea that dominion is more about stewardship than domination.



Gather (10-15 minutes)**Check-in**

Welcome the group and make sure all know one another. Briefly introduce the overall theme of this course and any information the group members will need about how the eight sessions will be scheduled.

Pray

Creator God, we confess that you are the one behind it all. Your imagination is beyond us, your bounty extravagant. As we explore Scripture today, keep us mindful of the miracle you have created all around us, and the miracle you have created in us. Through Jesus, we know your intention to be with us, even now. Open our hearts and minds to your good will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Focus Activity

Using the supplies provided, quickly create a collage with pictures that express the wonder of creation. When you are done, hang your collage. Take time to quietly reflect on what you and others have created.

Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

Ask for two volunteers, one to read Genesis 1:1—2:4a; and one to read Genesis 2:4b-25.

OR

Ask the learners to make a small note in the margin next to anything that they would like to return to after the reading. After the reading, give learners a moment to think about the reading. You can spark their thinking by asking for anything that was surprising, comforting, interesting, or confusing.

Read Genesis 1:1—2:4a and Genesis 2:4b-25. Consider pausing after each part of the reading to answer these questions.

- What questions or thoughts did you have as you listened?
- What words would you use to describe the God at work in this reading?
- What is surprising in this reading?

**Tip:**

As you renew your acquaintance with this Bible story, your group may likewise be renewing acquaintances. Newcomers may also be joining. Make sure introductions are made. Name tags may be a good idea. Snacks, or even a meal to celebrate the new beginning, can help all to feel comfortable and secure together.

**Tip:**

Provide magazines, especially nature magazines, scissors, newsprint or construction paper, markers, and glue or tape. Prepare your own collage ahead of time. If your group finds it difficult to get started, you can show your collage as an example.

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Tip:

Provide Bibles for those who may not have brought theirs to the session.



Tip:

Be sensitive to potential non-readers in your group. Avoid going around in a circle to read the texts, as this puts pressure on those not comfortable reading aloud. Get to know your willing volunteer readers and call on them when you can.



Tip:

Help the learners reflect first on the *feel* of the readings. You could create two groups, one for each text, and ask them to write down what God created and when (the order of creation).



Bonus Activity:

In John 1:1-5, the Gospel writer speaks of the Word being present at the creation (and in this case, the poem seems to point toward Christ as the Word). Read Genesis 1:1-5 aloud. Follow it immediately with John 1:1-5. Discuss how these two texts sound alike and how they are different.

Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

Literary Context

1. Scan Genesis 1:1—2:4a and Genesis 2:4b-25 again. The scriptures present us with something to be curious about. List the similarities and differences between these two stories.
2. While common conversation about the biblical creation talks about seven days, it's easy to see that only the first story is interested in the number of days. What is the second story interested in? What might be the deeper meaning here?
3. The first story seems more formal. What clues do you see that this story might have been used for more ritualized purposes, such as worship? Where else has this story been used?
4. If you were writing your own version of Genesis 1 or Genesis 2 as a movie script, who would you cast for the main characters? How would you picture God? Which part of the story would you emphasize most? Why?

Historical Context

The first chapters of Genesis are old stories, probably told for generations before they were written down. Scholars believe these stories come from two different faith traditions, which, helpfully, used different names for God. Most scholars believe the second story was written down earlier and is therefore older than the first.

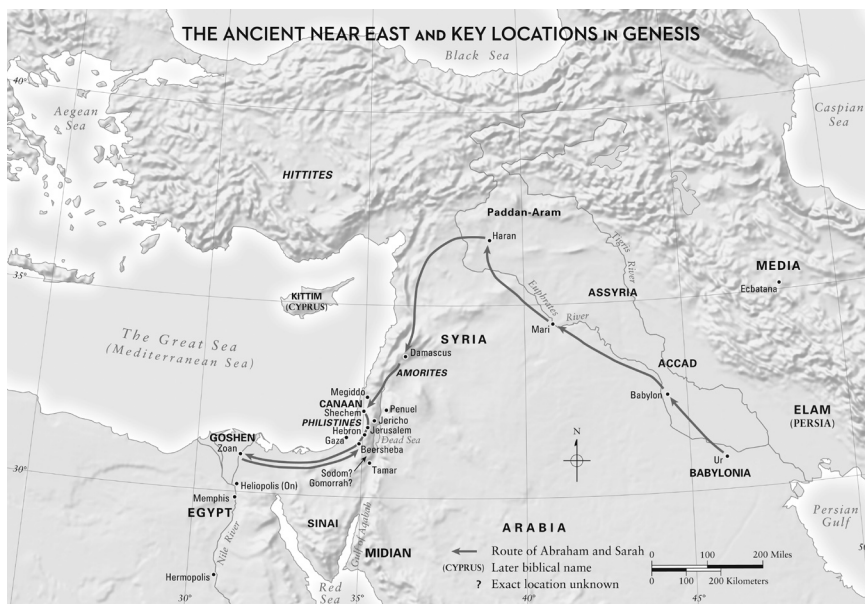
1. In Genesis 1, God is called *Elohim*. In English Bible translations this is translated simply as “God.” In Genesis 2, a different name for God is used. This Hebrew name *Yahweh* is translated as “LORD” in English versions (notice the small caps). In chapter 2, these two names are combined, so God’s name is *Yahweh Elohim* (LORD God). Because most of us do not read Hebrew, you can use the English translation to help you keep track of when a particular tradition seems to be speaking.
 - How does this explanation of these names for God seem to shed light on whether or not we actually have two stories being brought together in Genesis 1 and 2?
 - What do you think of the idea that this ancient story of creation might have more than one version, and the content of those versions might have been influenced by the historical and social environment of the writers?

2. Many biblical scholars believe that the first story of creation was produced in the context of the Babylonian exile, to prove the power of the God of Israel over the Babylonian gods. The Babylonian creation verse narrative, the *Enuma elish*, was full of violence between the various gods as they fought for power, god killing god for dominance.

- How is the first Genesis story different from this Babylonian story?
- In Genesis 1, what action gives creation life? What gives creation life in Genesis 2?

+ Bonus Activity:

To set the emotional stage for the first creation story, read Psalm 137, which expresses the despair of the exile. Ask the group to stand, and as the psalm is read, let their bodies reflect the mood (droopy, discouraged, sad). Then read the first creation story, and ask them to change their bodies to reflect the mood of this reading (strong, sure, hopeful, at rest).



3. Reread 2:10-14 and then look at the map above. Can you locate the traditional location of the Garden of Eden? Don't worry if you don't know exactly. Do you know what countries are found in this region today?

Lutheran Context

1. Let's use the Lutheran principle of Scripture interprets Scripture to explore the theme of God as creator. For example, look at these passages from other parts of the Bible. What conviction or confession do they share with Genesis 1 and 2?

- Psalm 8
- Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18
- Isaiah 48:12-13
- John 1:1-3

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Tip:

Though the exact location of Eden is uncertain, the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers begin in modern Syria and Turkey, eventually draining the land of Iraq before meeting near Al Basrah and then draining into the Persian Gulf.



Bonus Activity:

Use Genesis 2:15-22 to talk about the Lutheran concept of vocation (living out a life of faith in daily work). Adam receives a clear path to follow in the garden. The work that he will do will be a gift from God. As he names the creatures and tills the land, he will know that he is doing God's work. In that work, he will be blessed, and the first blessing will be his partner in his life's work, Eve. Talk about the work God has given each person in your group to do. (This work need not be limited to paid employment.)

2. The First Article of the Apostles' Creed simply states: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth."

In his Small Catechism, Martin Luther explains that this means God not only creates us but also preserves us—both body and soul—by providing everything we need in our daily life.

- How is this confession of faith based on Genesis 1 and 2?
- Why is it important to keep straight who is the creator and who is the created one?

3. Lutherans consider the Bible to be the authoritative source for knowing divine truth that God reveals to us.

- In your view, how does the story of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 fit with modern scientific evidence that attempts to describe how the world was created?
- Make a list comparing divine and scientific claims. How do you think the divine truth in this story lines up with scientific truth?

Devotional Context

1. Look back to the Focus Image. What do you think of the artist's interpretation of creation? As you think about creation around you, what is most amazing or awe-inspiring to you? What is most bewildering or even confusing? To what part of creation do you feel most connected? Why?

2. In the second creation story, God forms the human being from the dust of the ground: *adam* (man) from *adamah* (earth or dirt). It's a word play in Hebrew: human from humus or earthling from earth. What does this say about our relationship to the earth? Name two things you do to care for the creation around you and two things you do to care for the creation that is you.

3. The stories of creation establish part of God's way of interacting with humanity. How does learning about God's relationship with humans affect your faith and self-understanding? How about your attitude toward other people?

4. Which image of the Creator God appeals to you most—the transcendent and powerful God who creates a world out of chaos by a powerful word and spirit-wind, or the more intimate Potter who stoops to create human beings out of the dust and allows them to help God name the animals? Why?

Wrap-up (5-10 minutes)

1. Review learners' initial thoughts and questions as they first heard the text. Then invite them to name what they are aware of now about these texts that they were not aware of before the session began. List these things where everyone can see them and ask, "What difference does it make that you know this now?"
2. Briefly recap the session's key moments, starting with the most energetic portions of the conversation. At what points or on what topics did the group become particularly engaged? Simply surface these moments as important by mentioning them. Ask: How have these stories' assumptions about God's relationship with humans affected your own faith and self-understanding? How about your stance toward other humans?
3. Explain and assign any portion of the homework from this session. Tell learners which portions you want them to work on and why. Remind them to bring their notes and responses to the next session for discussion.
4. Thank the group members for their participation and excellent questions. Be sure to affirm all thoughtful engagement.

Pray

We offer thanks to you, O God, for the gift of your Word. For millennia, your faithful have told your story, and we gratefully receive their testimony of faith. Give us courage to give voice to our own testimony of life in your embrace, created and called into your service. Embolden us to love your creation as you do. In Jesus, we are your own, made in your image, and loved. With gratitude and praise, we pray. Amen.

Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)**Homework**

1. Read the next session's Bible passage: Genesis 3:1-24. If time permits, read all of Genesis 3-4.
2. Do an Internet search on creation stories and explore other cultures' origin stories. How have you been shaped by Genesis? Choose another creation story to focus on. How might you be different if you had grown up out of this story?

**Bonus Activity:**

Give learners time to journal about what difference it makes to know that God has created them on purpose, with purpose. How have they seen this truth at work in their lives?

**Tip:**

If you have learners who felt particularly stretched by this session, invite them to meet with you and your pastor to discuss it.

SESSION ONE



Tip:

If you have someone in the group or in your congregation who is interested in drama, encourage interested learners to work with him or her. If you are doing this session during Lent, your group could offer to “read” the creation story for the Easter Vigil!

3. Read through the whole *Enuma elish* story and bring your own plot summary to the next session (you can find translations on the Internet).

4. Write down your thoughts about Genesis 1 and 2 in a journal. Reflect on the meaning of the text in your life.

Looking Ahead

- Read the next session’s Bible passage: Genesis 3:1-24. If time permits, read all of Genesis 3–4.
- Read through the next session’s Leader Session Guide and mark the portions you wish to highlight for the group.
- Make a checklist of any materials you’ll need to do the Bonus Activities.

Enrichment

1. If you wish to read all of Genesis during this course, read the following sections this week.

Day 1: Genesis 1:1-8

Day 2: Genesis 1:9-19

Day 3: Genesis 1:20-25

Day 4: Genesis 1:26-31

Day 5: Genesis 2:1-9

Day 6: Genesis 2:10-17

Day 7: Genesis 2:18-25

2. Use an encyclopedia or an online search engine to find a recording of *The Creation* by Joseph Haydn. Jot down words or sketch out pictures inspired by the music.

For Further Reading

In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World told by Virginia Hamilton; illus. by Barry Moser (Harcourt, 1988).

On the Day You Were Born by Debra Frasier (Harcourt, 1991).

Available at www.augsburgfortress.org/store:

Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice, the ELCA’s social statement approved at the 1993 Churchwide Assembly. Also available at: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Environment.aspx>.

Storms over Genesis: Biblical Battleground in America’s Wars of Religion by William H. Jennings (Fortress Press, 2007).