

CONTENTS

| | | |
|----------|---|----|
| 1 | Origins: Where Do We Come From? <i>Genesis 1:1—2:25</i> | 5 |
| 2 | Mystery and Boundary: Can We Live with God's Terms? <i>Genesis 3:1-24</i> | 11 |
| 3 | Troubled in Paradise: How Does God Deal with Evil? <i>Genesis 6:11-14; 7:1-5; 7:17—8:4; 9:8-17</i> | 17 |
| 4 | Hanging on a Promise: How Long, O Lord? <i>Genesis 11:31—12:4; 17:1-8; 18:1-15</i> | 23 |
| 5 | How Could God Ask Such a Thing? <i>Genesis 21:1-8; 22:1-19; 25:19-26</i> | 29 |
| 6 | Does God Love Just Anyone? <i>Genesis 27:1-10, 15-17, 22-35; 32:22-32</i> | 35 |
| 7 | The Future: Yours, Mine, or Ours? <i>Genesis 37:1-11, 23-36; 41:14-16, 25-36</i> | 41 |
| 8 | Are We Promise Bearers? <i>Genesis 42:1-8; 45:1-10, 25-28; 46:28-30; 49:29-33; 50:15-26</i> | 47 |

SESSION ONE

Genesis 1:1—2:25

Learner Session Guide



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**

Origins: Where Do We Come From?

 Focus Image



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

Gather

Check-in

Take this time to connect or reconnect with the others in your group. Talk about who you are and what you hope to learn or gain from this study of Genesis.

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.

SESSION ONE



Notes

Open Scripture

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?

Join the Conversation

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 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?

3. Reread 2:10-14 and then look at the map on p. 8. 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

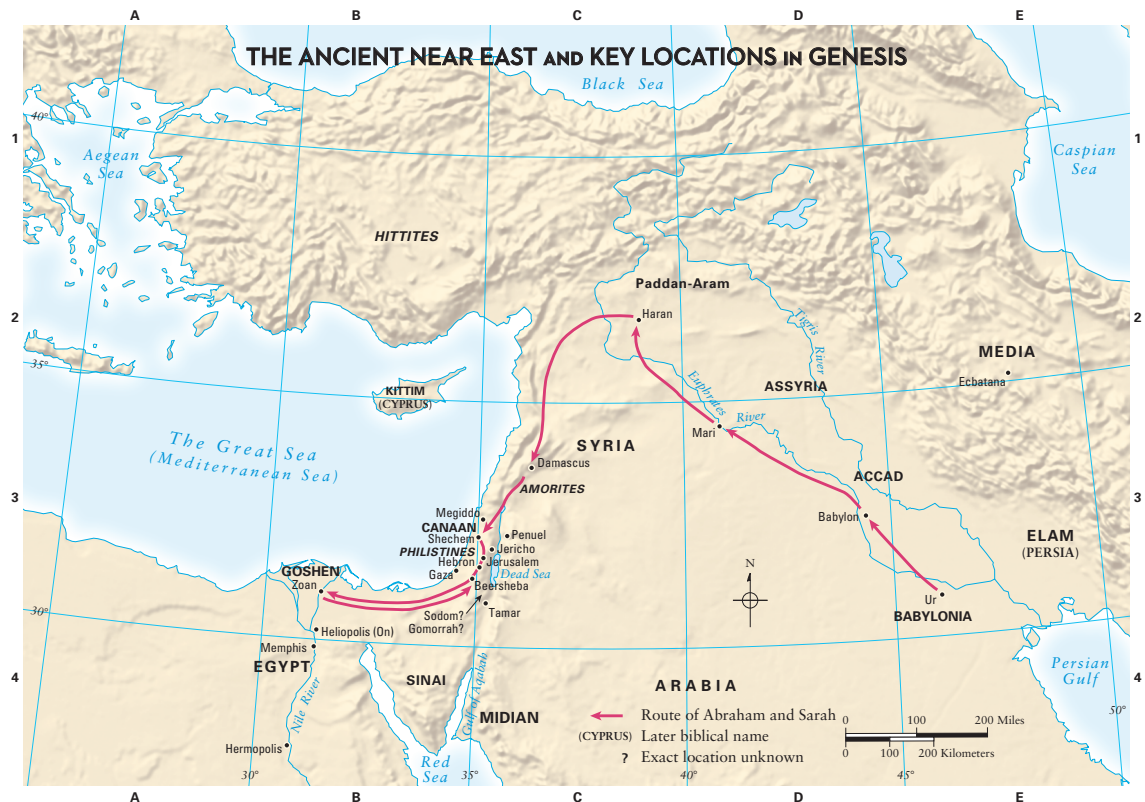
1. Let’s use the Lutheran principle of Scripture interprets Scripture to explore the theme of God as creator. For example, look at these passages from other parts of the Bible. What conviction or confession do they share with Genesis 1 and 2?

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



Notes

SESSION ONE



Notes

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 as 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

Be ready to look back over the work your group has done in this session.

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**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?

**Notes**

SESSION ONE



Notes

Choose another creation story to focus on. How might you be different if you had grown up out of this story?

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.

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).