

# I FROM WHOLENESS TO BROKENNESS

You don't find many teachers like him. He was one of the few science professors who knew so much about so many things. He studied the stars as an astronomer. He studied the laws of nature as a physicist. He studied the earth and rocks as a geologist. He studied living animals and birds and humans as a biologist. He tried to bring all his knowledge together to help answer the big questions of life and death in the world and the universe.



Jim Whitmer

Once a television reporter interviewed the science professor. They talked about the marvelous mysteries of the earth and the infinite universe. They talked about the pollution of our planet that endangers our lives. The reporter asked the professor what one basic thing he had learned from all his study. His reply was this: "The basic thing I've learned as a scientist is how little we know about where we came from, who we are, and where we are going."

Even more dramatically, the professor began to talk about his own personal experience of the mysteries of life and death since being diagnosed with cancer. This brilliant professor knew in his mind as well as in his body that human beings do not have all the answers. We live in a broken world. War. Pollution. Sickness. Death. How does God speak to these basic issues of life and death?

## 3 STATEMENTS

- The two creation stories in Genesis express deep truths about the purpose and meaning of life.
- God created human beings to have a loving relationship with God, with other human beings, and with the earth.
- Evil and human sin changed creation's wholeness and community into brokenness and separation.

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# Source

## CREATED IN WHOLENESS

The Bible is a story about God and God's love for all people and all creation. The Bible is also a story of how the relationships among God and people and creation move from wholeness to brokenness and again toward wholeness. This journey from wholeness to brokenness begins in Genesis 1–2 with the story of God's creation of the universe.

The first two chapters of Genesis record two different stories of creation. Both creation stories in Genesis express deep truths about the purpose and meaning of life.

Read the first creation story in Genesis 1:1–2:3.

1. Note the order of creation by drawing a collage on a separate sheet of paper of what was created during each of the seven days of creation:

First day (1:1-5)

Second day (1:6-8)

Third day (1:9-13)

Fourth day (1:14-19)

Fifth day (1:20-23)

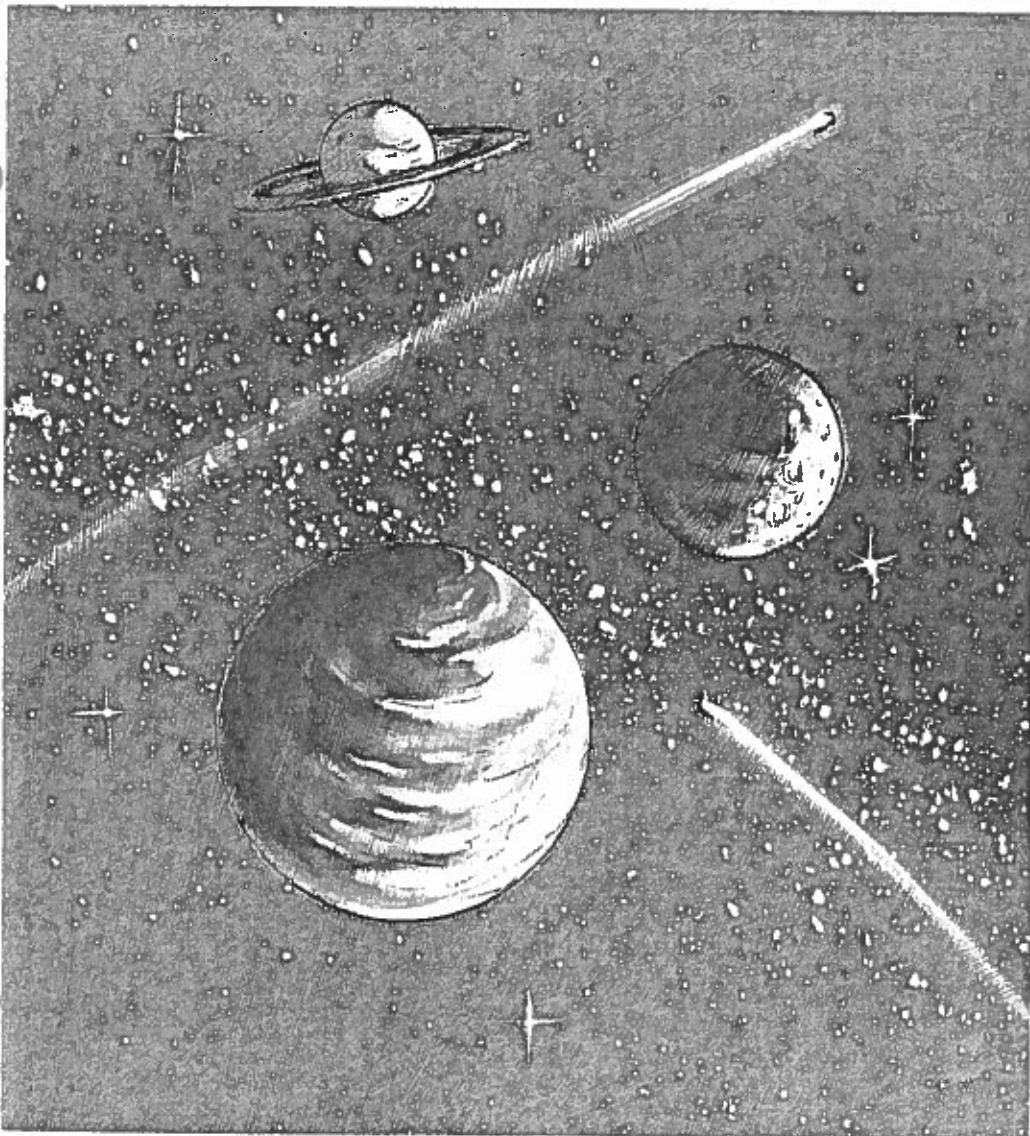
Sixth day (1:24-31)

Seventh day (2:1-3)

Many people see a very structured order in this first creation story. They see this story to be built on a pyramid. The pyramid of creation began with the universe at the base and God's Sabbath at the top.

Now read the second story of creation recorded in Genesis 2:4b-25. Many scholars think this story is much older than the one in Chapter 1.

*The two creation stories in Genesis express deep truths about the purpose and meaning of life.*



2. As you read this second creation story, write the order in which things were created.

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3. In this story, what leads you to think it might be the older of the two stories?

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**God created human beings to have a loving relationship with God, with other human beings, and with the earth.**

4. How does the second story of creation differ from the first creation story?

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In the first creation story in Genesis 1, the name for God is "God." The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language. In Hebrew the word used for God is *Elohim* (el-o-HEEM).

5. What is the name for God used in the second creation story in Genesis 2? \_\_\_\_\_ The Hebrew words for this name are *Yahweh Elohim* (YA-whay el-o-HEEM).

In the first creation story in Genesis 1, God created by simply speaking the words, "Let there be. . . ." The writer said, "and there was. . . ." In the second creation story, God bent down and formed the human from the dust of the earth like a potter working with clay. God breathed into the human the breath of life (see Genesis 2:7). The two stories have very different views of God. One focuses on the power of God's words and the other focuses on God's close contact and work with the world and its creatures.

Why did the biblical writers include two very different pictures of the creation of the world? Their concern was not to present the one factual scientific account of the creation of the world; rather, they included two very different accounts side by side to emphasize different aspects of the same story.

The two creation stories in Genesis express deep truths about the purpose and meaning of life. They provide answers to questions that science cannot answer, such as, "Who are we? What is the meaning of life? Why are we here?"

These are important questions that must be answered from many different viewpoints. That is why the writers of the Bible included two different stories of creation. What needed to be said could not all have been said in one account.

## CREATED FOR CARING

One important insight is shared by both creation stories: *God created human beings to have a loving relationship with God, with other human beings, and with the earth.*

1. Read Genesis 1:27-28. Human beings are created in the image of God. What do you think that means? How do the other parts of verses 27-28 help you answer that question?

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2. God instructed the humans to "have dominion" over nature and the rest of creation. The words "to have dominion" are used in Psalm 72:8 to describe how the king who rules God's people Israel ought to govern. Read Psalm 72:8, 12-14. Check the definition below that best describes "having dominion."

- Exploiting the creation for one's own selfish purposes
- Caring for and nurturing the creation, especially the fragile and powerless



3. How does understanding "having dominion" in Genesis 1 influence our concern for the environment today?

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Our relationship with God, others, and nature is also the concern of the second creation story in Genesis 2:4b-25. The man and woman were dependent on God for their life, breath, and food. They were called to a life of trust and obedient love. They could eat from any tree of the garden except one—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they ate from this one forbidden tree, they would die (Genesis 2:17).

God also provided the humans with community, companionship, and sexuality as good gifts. The woman and the man were created to enjoy each other in a loving and lifelong relationship. The humans were to nurture and care for nature as gardeners care for a garden so that it grows and flourishes in a clean and healthy environment. This call to till and nurture the garden is similar to God's command in Genesis 1:28 to "have dominion" over creation.

### GENESIS 3: FROM WHOLENESS TO BROKENNESS

We all know that the kind of perfect and good creation that God intended for the world from the beginning is not the way things really are in our world today. In Genesis 3, the writers used a story to probe the deeper truths of life and meaning.

*Evil and human sin changed creation's wholeness and community into brokenness and separation.* The story began in Genesis 3 with the sudden appearance of the serpent or snake who was just another of the creatures of the Garden of Eden. The serpent tempted the humans to eat fruit from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Both the man and the woman ate of the forbidden fruit and suddenly everything that was good in the garden was ruined. The harmful consequences



of their actions altered their relationship with God, with each other, and with creation.

1. What happened to the close and trusting relationship between God and the humans (Genesis 3:8-13)?

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2. What happened to the relationship between the man and the woman (Genesis 3:7, 12, 16)?

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3. What happened to the relationship between the humans and the world of nature (Genesis 3:13-15, 17-19)?

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Sin and evil and hatred and suffering entered into God's good creation. They are still part of the real world. God could have ended the whole world right there at the beginning. God had said that the punishment for eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree was immediate death. But God's love and grace moved in another direction.

*Evil and human sin changed creation's wholeness and community into brokenness and separation.*

4. What three good things did God do for the humans that enabled their lives to go on in spite of their sin (Genesis 3:20—4:1)?

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The man and woman could never return to the perfect world of the Garden of Eden. Its entrance was forever sealed off with a flaming sword. Thus, the writers of the Bible tell us that our lives will always involve some pain, conflict, suffering, and brokenness. We can never rebuild the perfect world of the Garden of Eden. The journey of God and God's people began with a perfect creation that soon moved to a broken and sinful world.

But that was not the end of the biblical journey. The last word is God's Word. God's love enabled the journey to continue by giving and forgiving. God gave Adam and Eve new clothes, and the chance to continue living outside the Garden of Eden. God gave the gift of children to begin a new generation. The journey of God and God's people continued because of the love and grace that God gave to the man and the woman, even though they did not deserve or earn it. The same love and grace are given to you as God's gift.

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## Shaping life

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### THE JOURNEY BACK TOWARD WHOLENESS

The brokenness of relationships is a real part of the world and of our lives. However, the stories told in Genesis 1–3 affirm that God intended the creation to be good and that God continues to be at work in the world to restore those broken relationships.

● *Our relationship with God.* One of the purposes of the creation stories in Genesis was to praise God for the good gifts of creation that God had given. The seventh day of creation, the Sabbath day of rest (Genesis 2:2-3), is the gift of worship and praise of God.

Write a prayer to God about the good things for which you are thankful. You may want to begin your prayer in this way: "O God who created the universe and everything good within it, I thank you for. . . ."

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● *Our relationship with other humans.* Consider a specific example in your life in which your relationship with another human being is not what you would like it to be. It might be a parent, brother or sister, classmate, neighbor, or former friend. What went wrong? What are some ways you could

## FURTHER

### *opportunities*

#### *Bible Reading*

Read Psalm 8, which is a creation psalm or prayer. Ask yourself how you would relate Psalm 8 and Genesis 1 in terms of similar words and ideas.

#### *Memory*

Memorize Genesis 1:1-3, and 1:31. These verses remind us that God is concerned and at work in all of creation and that God's creation in the beginning was intended to be very good.

#### *Activity 1*

Consider ways in which the relationships of human beings with God, other humans, and the environment have been broken or fractured. Think of news events or personal situations. Think of how you fit into the picture. Also think of the

help to improve that relationship?  
What first step could you take?

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● *Our relationship with nature.* Genesis 1–3 teaches us that God is concerned about all creation, including the world of nature and the environment. Pollution of the air, water, and land endangers the earth's ability to sustain life. What is one example of a pollution or environmental problem in your household or community?

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What steps could you or your community take in addressing the problem?

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larger picture of the nation or the whole earth.

In groups of two or three, draw pictures or symbols that represent or give examples of broken relationships. Your group could make a collage of news stories or pictures that illustrate the breakdown of these various relationships.

#### Activity 2

Discover ways your community helps to preserve and protect the environment. Are there special parks, or wildlife or nature preserves in the area to keep open space available? Are there recycling programs in your community? What other ways does your community or area try to keep our air, water, and land clean?

#### Activity 3

Keep a journal of the ways you see God's continuing creation in the world today. How do you see God at work to restore a broken creation?

# FOCUS

## ON SCIENCE AND CREATION

Many scientists today think that the universe began with a big bang that exploded an incredibly dense mass of matter into the universe billions of years ago. This exploded matter swirled into planets, stars, and solar systems. However, scientific theories of the origin of the universe and life on earth have changed over time as we have learned more about the universe.

The writers of the two creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 used their own understanding of the world as they wrote their stories.

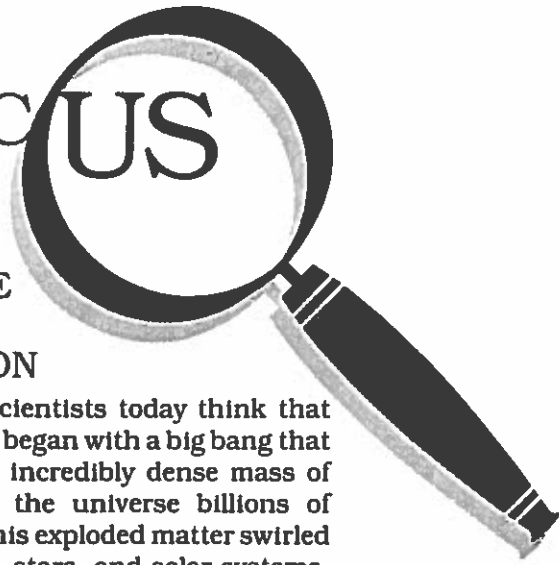
The story in Genesis 2 is probably the older of the two creation stories, written around 850 B.C. This story assumed that the original state of the world was a dry desert. Creation happened as mist or water began to turn this dry desert into a lush garden (Genesis 2:6). This understanding reflects an agricultural society in ancient Israel.

Scholars think that the creation story in Genesis 1:1–2:4a was written about 300 years after the story in Genesis 2. This story reflects a different view of the world.

The people of Israel had been defeated by the empire of Babylon. The Babylonians believed their god had killed a great sea monster and formed the heaven and earth from the monster's body parts. The Babylonian god also created by speaking a word.

The writers of Genesis 1 took over much of the Babylonians' understanding and reshaped it with their own experience of the one true God and God's relationship to creation.

The writers of both Genesis 1 and 2 were not really interested in presenting a scientific account of how the world began. Rather, the writers were concerned about the *who* of creation. Who is God? Who are we in relationship to God and to God's creation?



Garry Walter



Garry Walter