

# What's This I Hear about Different Creation Stories?



Session 1



**Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a; Genesis 2:4b–24; Psalm 8; Proverbs 8:22–31**

## Session Objective

This session introduces participants to four creation accounts in the Bible: the familiar stories from Genesis, as well as passages from Psalms and Proverbs that we may not typically think of as creation accounts. In exploring the different approaches that the biblical authors take to the subject of creation, we aim not to reconcile them with one another as much as to draw out their shared affirmations: God creates, creation is a mystery, and the proper human response is one of humility and reverence.

## Faith Statement

In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community.

—*A Brief Statement of Faith* (10.3)

## Session Overview

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|---|---|
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|  Engage  | Option A: Resting with the Question       |
|   | Option B: Coming from Different Places    |
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Enhancements

Family Connections  
Get Out in It  
Connect to the PC(USA)  
Web Site



For instructions to download Web Resources and the coffeehouse version, see page 1.

## Spiritual Reflection for Leaders

This session covers a lot of biblical ground: four passages from a variety of traditions and time periods in biblical history. Before you begin your preparation for leading the session, skim the four passages and choose the one with which you are least familiar to focus on in this time of personal spiritual reflection. Read the passage slowly, pausing between verses to allow the words and any images they conjure in your mind to surface. Consider the following questions:

- How do the images that came to mind in your reading reflect the words on the page, and how do they reflect your own life experiences?
- In what ways is this Scripture passage about creation? What other themes resonate with you in the passage?
- What do you think of when you hear the word *creation*?

Pray for the participants you'll be leading through this session and pray for the movement of the Holy Spirit in your preparation and leadership.



## Understanding the Scripture

Of the four Scripture passages explored in this session, those from Genesis are concerned explicitly with the process and mechanics of God's creating acts. The other passages, from Psalms and Proverbs, can be thought of as commentaries or reflections on creation.

The creation accounts in Genesis are sometimes mistaken for a single, continuous narrative; in fact, they come from different sources. Genesis 1:1–2:4a is part of what has been called the Priestly tradition (P), while Genesis 2:4b–24 belongs to the Yahwistic tradition (J) (so named because its author refers to God in Hebrew by the divine name *YHWH*, rendered in most English Bibles as "LORD"). The fact that these creation stories come from different traditions is helpful in that it explains the differences between them. For example, in the P creation account, human beings are created as God's final act. In the J account, the creation of man is God's first act upon a desertlike earth that was apparently already present, while the creation of woman is God's climactic act of creation.<sup>1</sup> Still, the fact that these different sources and stories have been interwoven throughout Genesis is an important clue that we should be less concerned with attempting to reconcile their differences than with seeking the larger truths that bind them together.

1. Regarding the issue of woman's subordination to man, John S. Kselman observes helpfully that "the creation of woman from man does not imply subordination, any more than the creation of the man from the earth implies subordination. The subordination of woman to man is effected by the frustration of the divine intention of equality, wrought by human sin" (in James L. Mays, ed., *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000], p. 86).

Psalm 8 is a hymn of praise, and the reason for that praise is that God has chosen to lift humanity to the pinnacle of creation. In verse 6, the psalmist exclaims in wonder, “You have given human beings dominion over the works of your hands”; in other words, humans have been appointed as caretakers, echoing Genesis 1:28. The psalm is an expression of the reaction—awe, wonder, humility, gratitude—of the creation to the Creator and as such can be thought of as supplying the piece that is missing from the P creation account in Genesis.

Proverbs 8:22–31 interjects another element that is not found in the creation stories of Genesis: the presence of Wisdom. Here, as elsewhere in Scripture and other ancient traditions, Wisdom is personified as a woman created or “brought forth” (i.e., “born”)<sup>2</sup> by God before creation. As Carole R. Fontaine notes, “The translation and interpretation of no passage in Proverbs is more hotly contested than this one, no doubt because Woman Wisdom’s claims are so difficult to assimilate within later Judaism and Christianity.”<sup>3</sup> Again, however, attempts at reconciliation are perhaps less important than seeking common themes: Wisdom proclaims that she was “daily [God’s] delight, . . . rejoicing in [God’s] inhabited world and delighting in the human race” (vv. 30–31). Thus, this passage, like the others explored in this session, culminates in a celebration of the human creation. This can be an important word for youth (and for all of us) to hear, and it calls for a fitting response, as suggested by Psalm 8: awe, wonder, humility, gratitude.



## Understanding the Faith Statement

*A Brief Statement of Faith*, the newest of the statements in the *Book of Confessions*, is a product of the 1983 reunion of the former northern and southern Presbyterian denominations, resulting in the creation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It is arranged in three major sections: one on Jesus Christ, one on God (“whom Jesus called Abba, Father”), and one on the Holy Spirit. The section about God begins with God as Creator, as does the Bible itself. While the Bible begins with a lengthy description of the details of God’s creation of the universe and the earth, the faith statement moves quickly to a focus on God’s human creation: as creatures made in God’s image and for life in community. This emphasis, though it differs in style from the Bible, is quite biblical in its substance, for the Bible’s main concern is not with the mechanics of creation but with our relationship to God, one another, and the created order.

2. Carole R. Fontaine, “Proverbs,” in James L. Mays, ed., *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, p. 456.

3. “Proverbs,” in James L. Mays, ed., *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, p. 455.



## **Teaching Today's Question**

When teenagers discover or are told that there is more than one account of creation in the Bible, it can be jarring. Often they have been brought up to believe that the Bible is completely internally consistent: the story of Adam and Eve, for example, is just a continuation of the seven days of creation described in Genesis 1. Thus, when youth realize that there are multiple creation accounts and that the pieces don't entirely fit together, a crisis of faith can result. Rather than skirt the issue, this session seeks to help the participants discover the larger truths that run through the different passages, truths that—unlike some of the minor details—are entirely consistent. The learning activities presented in the first half of the session explore some of the inconsistencies, while those in the latter half move toward seeking those larger truths. Allow the participants to wrestle with the inconsistencies, but also keep things moving along. This will ensure that you are able to give sufficient time and attention to the discoveries that can arise from challenges to faith.



## Enter

### Option A: I'm the Only Person Who Has . . .

- Index cards and pens

Before participants arrive, write *I'm the only person who has . . .* on a separate index card for each participant.

As participants arrive, give each person a pen and a prepared index card. Ask the participants to complete the sentence on their card with a short phrase about something that makes them unique among the other participants (e.g., ridden in a limousine, four cats, and so on).

Collect and redistribute the cards so that no one has their own card. Give each person an opportunity to read his or her card out loud to the group and then try to guess whose card he or she has. Once everyone has been matched to a card, lead the group in a brief time of sharing stories and experiences. Tell the participants that, though they have unique stories, they are all created in the image of God.

### Option B: Picturing Creation

- Magazines, scissors, small table, recording of "All Creation" by Chasen, music player

Before the participants arrive, cut images or words that connect with the word *creation* from magazines. Spread the images or words across a small table at the center of the meeting space.

As the participants arrive, play "All Creation" by Chasen and invite participants to choose an image or word that represents what they think of when they hear the word *creation*. Once everyone has had time to select their creation image or word, give each person a moment to share their image or word and why they chose it.



## Engage

### Option A: Resting with the Question

- Optional: candle, matches, music player, recording of "I Am" performed by Bebo Norman
- Consider setting the mood by dimming the lights, lighting a candle, and listening to "I Am." Gather the group in a comfortable space and explore the following questions together:



- What do you already know about the creation stories in the Bible?  
How many creation accounts are in the Bible? How are they similar and how do they differ?

- Is creation most about God’s act of creating the universe long ago, God’s ongoing creative activity, evolution, or all of the above? And why?
- Is it important to you to be sure that God created everything exactly as it is described in the Bible? If it’s important, how much do you struggle with reconciling the multiple biblical accounts of creation?

Pray the opening prayer.

**Option B: Coming from Different Places**

- Completed index cards from Option A in Enter or creation images (or words) from Option B in Enter

Explain to the participants that this session focuses on creation and the variety of creation accounts in the Bible. Noting the different life experiences among members of the group (from Option A in Enter) or the different ways they depicted creation (from Option B in Enter), explain that, similarly, there are a variety of creation accounts and interpretations in the Bible. Delve into this idea by exploring the following questions:

- Is the existence of different creation accounts a surprise to you? If so, do you find it troubling? Intriguing? No big deal? Explain.
- How important is it to you to be sure that God created everything exactly as it is described in the Bible?
- If it’s important to you that God created everything exactly as it is described in the Bible, how much do you struggle with reconciling the multiple biblical accounts of creation?

**Opening Prayer**

*Holy God, you call us out of our daily lives to be with you. Today we’ve gathered around your Word to wrestle with the mysteries of creation. We’ll never really comprehend the experiences of your people who lived thousands of years ago and halfway around this world you’ve made, but you stuck with them and you stick with us. Send us your Spirit and open us to that spark of illumination that you want us to catch. In the name of the One you sent to seal the covenant for good. Amen.*

Pray the opening prayer.



**Explore**

**Option A: Biblical Views of Creation**

- Bibles, copy of “Comparing the Creation Accounts” (Web Resource 1a) for each participant, pens, newsprint, markers

Give each participant a copy of “Comparing the Creation Accounts” (Web Resource 1a) and a pen. Divide the participants into groups of two or three.

Assign each group one or more of the following Scripture passages so that all of the passages have been assigned to at least one group:

- Genesis 1:1 —2:4a
- Genesis 2:4b–24
- Psalm 8
- Proverbs 8:22–31

If you have fewer than four participants, do this activity as one group.

Ask each group to read their assigned Scripture passage(s) and to answer the questions on “Comparing the Creation Accounts” (Web Resource 1a) for each of their assigned passages.

Give each group an opportunity to share their responses with the rest of the participants. Lead the participants in a discussion about the similarities and differences between the creation accounts in the four Scripture passages, recording the groups’ responses on a sheet of newsprint. Explore the following questions together:



- Is it important to you that the details of these passages match up? Why or why not?
- What lessons can we learn from the similarities and differences in the creation accounts?

### Option B: Genesis and Psalms



Bibles, Bible dictionary, newsprint, markers

Before the session, write the Faith Statement (see page 3) on a posted sheet of newsprint.

Make sure each participant has a Bible and have the group read Genesis 1:27–28 and Psalm 8:1–9 together. Explore the following questions together:



- How would you describe the point of view and attitude of the writer in each passage? Which writer, the author of Genesis or the psalmist, seems to be more passionate about his or her subject? How do you know?
- Which passage do you find more interesting or inspiring? Why?
- How are the two passages similar in how they describe human beings and our relationship to God? How do they differ?
- Look up *dominion* in a Bible dictionary. What, in your view, are the rights and the responsibilities of having dominion over the rest of creation?
- Look up “image of God” (or *imago dei*) in a Bible dictionary. What does it mean to you to be made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) or to be “made . . . a little lower than God” (Psalm 8:5)?
- Read the posted faith statement together. In what ways does this statement reflect or not reflect each Scripture passage, as you understand it?
- If you had to boil each of these passages down to its most important point, what would it be?

## Option C: Adam, Eve, God, and Wisdom

Bibles, newsprint, markers; *optional*: dictionary, Bible dictionary

Before the session, write the Faith Statement (see page 3) on a posted sheet of newsprint.

Make sure each participant has a Bible and have the group read Genesis 2:4b–24 and Proverbs 8:22–31 together. Encourage the participants to use a dictionary or Bible dictionary if they need clarification about a word or phrase. Explore the following questions together:



- Who is the speaker in each Scripture passage? Is the speaker involved in the action or simply reporting events?
- Which passage do you find more interesting or inspiring? Why?
- What does God’s attitude toward human beings seem to be in each passage? How does God interact with human beings?
- What surprises you about each passage? (What did you not expect to see? What did you expect to find but didn’t?)
- Read the posted faith statement together. In what ways does this statement reflect or not reflect each Scripture passage, as you understand it?

Ask the participants to summarize the similarities and differences between the two passages. Explore the following questions together:



- Is there any trace of Wisdom in the Genesis passage? If so, describe. If not, what common idea or purpose ties these passages together?
- What lessons from these passages can we apply to our own lives?



## Express

### Option A: Writing Time

Paper and pens

Give the participants time and space to write their own creation accounts based on their understanding of the creation accounts in the Bible. The participants’ accounts can be stories, poems, essays, and even news articles. Use the following questions to guide the participants as they prepare to write:



- What does it mean to you to say that God creates?
- What does it mean *today* to say that God creates?
- What is our role in caring for and sustaining creation, if any?

## Option B: Film Clip—*October Sky*

*October Sky* (1999, PG) and movie-viewing equipment

Before the session, preview the following clip from *October Sky*:  
1:33:05–1:39:49.

Introduce the film clip to the participants by sharing the following information: Set in 1957, the year the Soviet Union launched the satellite Sputnik, *October Sky* is the true story of Homer Hickam, the son of a West Virginia coal miner who escaped a life in the mine when he won a college scholarship by designing, building, and flying a rocket. The source of conflict in the film is Homer's relationship with his father, who believes that Homer is wasting his life by building rockets and dreaming about going to college when he could have a perfectly good life by working in the coal mines. The film clip begins with an exchange between Homer and his father and then shifts to the scene of Homer's climactic rocket launch. Watch the clip together and explore the following questions:



- Read Psalm 8:3–4. How might Homer have interpreted those verses? How would Homer's father, the coal miner, interpret them?
- Consider Psalm 8:6: "You have given [human beings] dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet." What is literally under the feet of the characters in *October Sky*? If the psalmist had known about coal mining, do you think he or she would have considered coal mining an aspect of human beings' rightful dominion over creation? Why or why not?
- Two elements of creation are important in *October Sky*: the sky itself and the coal that exists under the earth. How do Homer and his father feel about them? How does the film seem to treat these elements? Are they equally important? Are they to be celebrated? To be feared?
- Read Psalm 8:5. Is Homer "crowned with glory and honor"? Why or why not? And if so, who "crowned" him?

## Option C: Creation Mural

Butcher paper, small bowls, water, watercolor paints, paintbrushes

Roll out butcher paper onto a table and fill the small bowls with water. Set out the watercolor paints, paintbrushes, and small bowls of water.

Help the participants work together to plan and paint a mural depicting creation, incorporating the creation accounts studied in Explore. When the work is complete and dry, display it in the meeting space or seek permission to display it in the sanctuary or another common area of the church.



## Exit

### Personalized Portraits

- Letter-sized paper, pens

Gather the participants in a circle and give each participant a sheet of paper and a pen. Lead the participants through this exercise by giving the following instructions:

- Write your name at the bottom of the page and pass the paper to the person on your right.
- Draw the shape of the head of the person whose name is on the bottom of the page and pass the page again to the right.
- Draw the named person's mouth and pass the page again.

Continue this process based on how many participants are in the group. Invite participants to draw the named person's nose, eyes, ears, hair, and extras such as glasses and jewelry.

Once the drawings are complete, collect the portraits and redistribute them so that no one has their own portrait. Ask each person to take home the portrait that he or she received and pray for this person daily throughout the week.

Pray the closing prayer.

### Closing Prayer

*Holy God, you've called us out of our daily lives to be with you, but now you send us back into the world. We thank you for the great mystery of creation; help us to do our part to be in harmony with all the created order. Help us keep our eyes and ears open to the wonders—and the crying needs—of this world you love. In the name of the One you sent to go before us and beside us. Amen.*



## Enhancements

Other Ways to Connect with the Session

### Family Connections

“Family Connections” (Web Resource) has a set of discussion questions for each of the six sessions in this course that families can talk about after class. Provide each family with a copy of this resource.

### Get Out in It

Plan an outing for your group to enjoy God’s creation. Depending on their interests and maturity level, this could be a hike in the woods nearby, a backpacking trip, or a whitewater rafting adventure. Try to visit a unique and unspoiled natural feature—a waterfall, a rock outcropping, an island in a river or lake—and plan a devotional or Bible study, perhaps revisiting one of the Scripture passages studied in this session.

### Connect to the PC(USA) Web Site

Visit [pcusa.org/environment](http://pcusa.org/environment) to learn more about the efforts of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in creation stewardship,. The site has links to various environmental resources and information about the work of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s Environmental Ministries office.



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