PRESENT WORD ADULT STUDENT'S BOOK

FALL 2018
GOD'S WORLD AND GOD'S PEOPLE

ABOUT THE WRITER

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COMING NEXT QUARTER

The winter quarter begins with God's demands for our complete and undivided love as shown in passages from Deuteronomy and Psalms. It proceeds with our response to God's love in the advent of Christ and the Epistles' interpretations of the nature and extent of our responses to God's love in Christ. It concludes with passages from three of the Psalms expressing glorification of God.

Unit I, "God Commands Our Love, Respect, and Obedience" Unit II, "Loving God by Trusting Christ" Unit III, "Love Songs That Glorify God"

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Published in partnership with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, The Moravian Church in America (North and South), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ.

The Present Word is published quarterly by Geneva Press, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202-1396.

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Printed in the United States of America



ADULT STUDENT'S BOOK

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Writer Donald K. McKim	2. September 9	God Created Plants and Animals
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	13. November 25	God Blesses Jacob and Rachel

Introduction

Genesis's familiar words, "In the beginning..." (Genesis 1:1), introduce accounts of God's creation of everything that is. Genesis describes the beginnings of God's relationship with the creation, including humanity, in covenantal terms. Creation begins the story of God's work in the world and with people whose lives are related to God—in ways bad and good.

The book of Genesis is a rich narrative, full of memorable characters and events. The book, as the church's Scripture, points us toward our beginnings as a human race, as well as the origins of our faith in the God who is revealed in Genesis. God cares and loves the creation and supports the good of human creatures by being present with them.

In this quarter, we learn of God's ways in the world. God supports those who look to God as a wise and caring creator. Like those in Genesis, we find that God is dependable. God is with us. The mystery of God's presence can never be fully explained, only experienced. We, as people in Genesis also found, experience God's directions in our lives—indirectly, but in genuine ways. We are tempted in many directions, to turn away from God or live life only as we want. But we can trust God's providence as God's benevolent guidance. In faith, we find God's good purposes for us. In our daily lives, we can live joyfully and with the assurance that God guides and cares for us.

SESSION



SCRIPTURE SELECTION

Genesis 1:1-13

VERSES TO REMEMBER

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

—Genesis 1:1-2

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

M In Your Suffering Trust the Creator, 1 Peter 4:15–19

T Renewed by the Creator, Col. 3:8–11

W God Provides the Water, Isa. 41:17-20

T The Wind and Water Obey the Voice of Jesus, Mark 4:35–41

F God Sends the Rain to Everyone, Matt. 5:43–48

S God Is Great; God Is Good, Ps. 33:1–9

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2018

God Created the Heavens and Earth

1.1 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

6 And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." ⁷So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

9 And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.



STEPPING INTO THE WORD

We live in a great and beautiful universe! Reflect on the world around us, the heavens above us and all we observe, and we are amazed at the greatness of everything that exists. Wonders are displayed, wherever we cast our eyes. Day after day as we read of new scientific discoveries, we are staggered by the complexities, immensity, and intricacies of even just what human efforts have detected.

Sensitive minds cannot help but wonder about where all this greatness originates. We realize it cannot be of human origin. However much we marvel at human achievements in the natural world or the discoveries of science, they pale in comparison with creation itself—its magnitude, its vastness—to say nothing of life in all its varied forms.

While science may propose theories about "how" all things came into existence, the Bible tells us "why" the creation has emerged and, most importantly, "who" has created all things— "the heavens and the earth." Scripture's intent is not to explain the "how" but to tell us the "why"—and the "who." God created all. The God of the Bible who is active in human history—who established the people of Israel, and who has come to us as a human being in Jesus Christ—is the One who created the marvelous wonders of our universe!

THE DIVINE WORD

God is creator. The Bible does not argue for the existence of God. The Bible assumes the existence of God. This God is the creator of all things and the one who is in an active relationship with the creation. Of this first verse in the Bible, it can be said that "the main theme of the text is this: God and God's creation are bound together in a distinctive and delicate way. This is the presupposition for everything that follows in the Bible." God chooses to create and to bind God's self to the creation by an ongoing, active involvement in all that God has created. This is the story of the Bible.

God is creator. The Hebrew term for "create" (Heb. *bara'*) is used only of God in the Hebrew Bible. It refers exclusively to divine activity. God creates by God's Word. This is a mark of the story of creation: "God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). Then follows other instances of the Divine Word (seven times in Genesis 1), including that a dome was established (v. 6), dry land appeared (v. 9), and vegetation

^{1.} Walter Brueggemann, Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 22.

appeared (v. 11). God's powerful Word and command brought all into existence.

Two other instances in the Old Testament explicitly affirm God's Word accomplishes God's purpose in creation. The Psalmist says: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.... For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Psalm 33:6, 9). Then also, Psalm 148 calls all creatures to praise God and gives the reason: "Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed" (148:5, 6).

Creation occurs solely by God's Word. No other power or authority can perform what the divine command carries out. In the New Testament, when speaking of the Word of God— Jesus Christ—the evangelist wrote: "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:3; cf. 1:1). Further in the New Testament, affirmations are made that God created all things out of nothing (Latin: ex nihilo). God "calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Romans 4:17) and "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible" (Hebrews 11:3). Christian theology has taught that since God is prior to all things, God created all things out of nothing. If God had used any preexisting material, then that material would have been present at creation and God would not have been the only reality.

God's divine Word brings everything into existence in this amazing and wondrous universe. God's Word is God's act. What God says is accomplished.

CREATION'S MEANING AND PURPOSE

The ancient Genesis texts, which proclaim God as creator of an awesome creation, have great importance. They are significant for the created order as well as for the human beings God created.

The people of Israel, whom God called and who proclaimed God as creator of heaven and earth, realized God's Word was the expression of who God is. The God who created is the God who calls the people of Israel into a covenant relationship with God with the desire that "you shall be my people"

(Leviticus 26:12). All God's actions, including creation, show that God relates to the people God created—the community of Israel. This was a practical importance of proclaiming God as creator. The creator God is also the God, the Lord of Israel. The Bible's account of God's involvement with the creation shows the constant and faithful love for all God created and especially for God's people.

Recognizing God as creator is also important because it shows that the creation has meaning and purpose. The creation exists as an expression of God's will. God desired to create "the heavens and the earth." That desire was realized through God's Word by which all things came to be. God's Word expresses God's will. God's Word continues to address the creation and God continues to be involved with the creation. So God's will and purposes continue to be done throughout the creation. God is fully active, supporting all aspects of the created order. Psalm 104 proclaims the work of the "very great" God (v. 1) who "set the earth on its foundations" (v. 5) and "in wisdom" carries out all God's works (v. 24). God's will and purposes are being carried out throughout the earth in all God created. What God does in all things carries with it meaning and purpose for the creation—and for us, as part of God's awesome creation.

Nothing can give us deeper meaning for our lives than recognizing God's will and purposes being carried out in our lives. The famous atheist or agnostic, Bertrand Russell, once wrote of "man" that "his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms." This is the bleakest picture of life without belief in a creator God. There can be no sense of meaning or purpose because human life and all creation itself are not grounded in God's will and creative Word. Life is pure chance and randomness.

But to believe God created the universe and continues to support it and guide it according to God's will and purposes brings meaning to all things. The creator loves the creation; the creator honors the freedom of creatures; and the creator enters a relationship of love with those joined to God's purposes. Humans can become the creations God intends them to be. We can be joined with God's will and, as creatures, serve the creator who gave us the "breath of life."

^{2.} Bertrand Russell, "The Free Man's Worship," The Independent Review 1 (December 1903): 415–24; at https://users. .drew.edu/jlenz/br-free -mans-worship.html.

PRAISE FOR GOD THE CREATOR AND THE CREATION

In what ways do we respond and celebrate God's creation and the creator of "heaven and earth"? The first thirteen verses of Genesis 1 show God's creative acts: day and night (v. 5); the sky (vv. 6–8); the sea and dry land, the earth (vv. 9–10); plants and vegetation (vv. 11–12). These prepared the earth for all its habitants, including humans.

These elements include features of our world we now take for granted. These creative acts of God provide the context for the life of the earth and for the lives of those who would inhabit the world. When we see the world around us, in all its natural glory and with its natural features, we reflect on God's grace and care. God has provided all this and we receive its benefits, in every instant of our lives!

Since the creation is the work of God's Word and will, it is perfect. In this sense, all creation evokes awe and praise. Indeed, "the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). God's wisdom in creation is praised: "It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens" (Jeremiah 10:12). When God created, God referred to the works of creation as "good" (Genesis 1:4, 12, 18, 21, 25). Surveying all God created, God pronounces it "very good" (1:31). That is, God's created works are suitable for the purposes for which God has created them. They come from God; so they are "good." To God and God alone can goodness be attributed: "I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who by myself spread out the earth" (Isaiah 44:24).

Our response is to express our praise and thanksgiving. We are blessed by being able to receive the work of the divine creator—in the creation and in our lives. We praise and thank God for God's "wonderful works"—in all their glory and goodness. We join with the Psalmist in proclaiming: "O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens" (Psalm 8:1) and "I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High" (Psalm 9:1–2). Our whole lives show forth the praise of God the creator: "My mouth is filled with your praise, and with your glory all day long" (Psalm 71:8).

	What are the implications of God's creative Word being source of all that exists in the universe?) the
•	When have you been aware of your life's meaning purpose because of God's will and purposes for you?	and
•	What are ways you can express praise and thanksgiving God for the wondrous creation in which we live?	g to

PRAYER

O creator God, you have brought into being all things. Your creative word is the source of the heavens and the earth. We praise you! We thank you for this wonderful universe with its vastness and greatness. We praise your creative power to establish meaning and purpose for all things. All creation exists to give you glory. May we live to give you glory too. May we tend to the earth, the home you have given us, as responsible stewards. May we behold your wonders and know the greatest wonder, that you love us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A LOOK AHEAD

People's life experiences sometimes lead them to question whether the universe is ordered or unpredictably chaotic. How do the diverse parts of nature work together? Genesis 1 shares that God brought order to the universe God made, establishing the heavenly bodies and filling the sea, sky, and land with diverse and abundant life.

Background Scripture for Next Time

Genesis 1:14-25