

# GENESIS 1

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## **Genesis 1:1**

The English translation of the word *god* comes from the Hebrew word *elohim*, which is a plural word. However, the verb *created* in Hebrew is *bara'*, which is singular. In order to make sense in English (and many other languages), one of them had to be changed since we do not use singular verbs with plural subjects. A translator has to either change the verb to plural to agree with the plural subject—which is how Joseph Smith translated these words in the book of Abraham (see Abraham 4:1)—or change the subject to the singular “God.” Since most translators of the Bible are monotheists (believing in one God, not many gods), this is the word that got changed in translation.

## **Genesis 1:2**

Note that the earth already existed *before* God spoke: “the earth was without form [chaotic] and void [empty].” “The deep,” or waters, were part of the already existing disorganized matter. Thus, the idea that *nothing* existed until God spoke—*creatio ex nihilo*—is not supported by the text.

The Hebrew word for *spirit* is *ruach*, a feminine word also meaning “breath” or “wind.” The Hebrew verb describing the action of the Spirit is *rākhaph*, meaning “to hover or flutter like a bird.” Thus, the first description of the Spirit of God suggests a bird or dove.

## **Genesis 1:3**

*Light* in Hebrew is *’or* or *’ur*. The plural of this is *orim* (as in the Urim and Thummim). A thing that holds lights—a candlestick—is called a *menorah*. Note the Hebrew root *’or* in the middle of the word.

## **Genesis 1:4**

The Hebrew word *badal*, here translated as “divided,” is better understood as “distinguished between.” This is a priestly word often used in Leviticus to describe one of the major jobs of the temple priests: distinguishing between something that is clean—and thus holy or acceptable for offering at the temple—and something that is unclean—that is, profane or unacceptable for temple worship. This word, which refers to the temple, is used five times in this chapter.

## **Genesis 1:5**

Note that the order of day and night and light and darkness is reversed at the end of this verse: evening and morning. This is a common form of poetry in Hebrew—the first is last and the last is first.

Since the evening is mentioned first and the morning is second, this established how a day was measured in Jewish culture. A day begins at sunset and proceeds through darkness and then into light, ending at sunset twenty-four hours later.

## **Genesis 1:6**

“Firmament” is a good translation of the Hebrew *raqiya'*, which evokes something firm or solid, like metal or brass, hammered out into a thin sheet (like gold leaf). This idea—that something solid is placed between the “waters which were above,” such as clouds or rain, and the “waters which were below,” such as oceans, seas, rivers, or lakes—will later be used poetically by authors who describe drought and famine by saying the “heavens are as brass” (Deuteronomy 28:23) or “opening the windows of heaven” in order to pour out rain (Genesis 7:11; Malachi 3:11).

## **Genesis 1:9**

This verse reinforces the idea that the waters of the deep covered the already-existing rocks and land.

## **Genesis 1:9–10**

Both these verses use the Hebrew word *qavah*, which means “to gather.” The waters are gathered together, and the dry land appears. In Judaism, a place where fresh waters are gathered together for rituals of cleansing is called a *miqveh*, which is based on the same Hebrew root. It is interesting that a baptismal font, a gathering of water for a ritual of cleansing, becomes the location for the “Gathering of Israel.” This is shown in an

article by David A. Edwards, who observed, “All people can be gathered to Israel, either by direct descent or by adoption, which happens when they are baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Genesis 1:11–13**

After gathering the water together so the dry land would appear, God made two different classes of plants: grasses and herbs, which bear seed, and fruit trees, which bear fruit. Both grasses and herbs will later be used symbolically by Jesus in parables that allude to His death and resurrection and that describe missionary work as the growth of the kingdom of God. Fruit trees are often associated with women and the fruit they bear, beginning with the story of Eve in the Garden of Eden.

### **Genesis 1:14–19**

“Let there be” translates from the Hebrew root word *yehi*, a form of the verb *to be* (*hayah*), which will be used in two of the names for God: YHVH, or “Jehovah,” and AHYH, or “I AM,” suggesting that God is the one who causes all things to be.

The word for *light* in this passage, *m’oroth*, is the feminine plural noun form of the word *’or*. The feminine singular noun, *men’orah*, is the name for the seven-branched candlestick in the Mosaic tabernacle. These lights—the sun and the moon—were created for several reasons:

- For giving lights to the earth.
- For signs. The Hebrew for *sign* is *otot*. The singular, *sign*, is *’oth*. That is spelled *aleph* (which is the *first* letter in the Hebrew alphabet), *vav* (which is the Hebrew letter that means “and”), and *tav* (which is the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet). Thus, the “sign” is the “first and the last.” In Greek, it is the great “Alpha and Omega.” Both are names for Jesus Christ. How do the sun and the moon teach of Christ? Every day, the sun is born, gives light to the earth, and dies, only to rise again the next morning. The moon reflects the light of the sun to earth, as Christ reflects the glory of the Father.
- For seasons. This word does not refer to the four seasons; instead, the Hebrew word *mo’ed* refers to the holy days when all Israelites were expected to go to the temple in Jerusalem. These include the spring festivals of *Pesach* (Passover), Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits; the summer feast of *Shavuot* (Feast of Weeks or Pentecost); and the fall holy days of *Rosh Hashanah* (New Year), *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), and *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles). The annual dates for these

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<sup>1</sup> David A. Edwards, “12 Facts about the Gathering of Israel,” *New Era*, July 2019, <https://churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2019/07/12-facts-about-the-gathering-of-israel>.

holy days were determined by the positions of the sun and the moon. For example, Passover is celebrated fifteen days after the first new moon after the spring equinox—which means that it occurs on a full moon night. The extra light provided by the full moon was a benefit for believers traveling to the temple and to the temple priests and staff working that night.

- For days. The rising and setting of the sun determines the twenty-four-hour day. From the rising of the sun, though day and night, to the next sunrise is twenty-four hours.
- For years. A solar year is measured from one spring equinox (when daytime is the same length as nighttime) to the next spring equinox, or 364<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> days.

As a side note, months (or “moon-ths”) are measured from one new moon to the next new moon in both Jewish and Muslim lunar calendars.

### **Genesis 1:20–23**

On day five, God created birds to fly in the clouds (the waters above the firmament) and fish to swim in the seas and lakes (the waters below the firmament).

### **Genesis 1:23–31**

As on the third day, there were two separate creations on day six. In verses 23–24, God began by creating land animals, placing them on dry land. Then He created creeping things like reptiles, insects, and amphibians.

Humans were the second creation on day six (see verses 25–31). “Earthlings” is a better translation because it captures the fuller meaning of the Hebrew *adam*—humankind—which is related to *adamah*, translated as “earth” at the end of verse 24.

In verse 27, humans were *created*, not made. The Hebrew verb here is *bara*, used in Genesis 1 only in verses 1, 21, and 27. *Bara* is a very interesting Hebrew word because it is used only in connection with God’s ability to create.

Creation in the image and likeness of God can also be understood as creation in the image and likeness of the gods since the Hebrew word for “God,” *elohim*, is plural.

Note that humans are first described by the sex terms *male* and *female*, not the more generic *man* and *woman*. The Hebrew word for male is *zachar*. Thus the names of the Old Testament prophet Zachariah

and the New Testament priest Zacharias both mean “Jehovah is (or will be) male.” The Hebrew word for female is *neqevah*, a rather graphic term meaning “pierced or having a hole.” Relating to the sex roles indicated in these verses, males bear seed and females bear fruit. In verse 28, humans were commanded to multiply and replenish the earth, continuing the focus on reproduction.

Note that in verse 29, the earthlings (*adam*) were given both grain (grasses bearing seed) and trees bearing fruit to use for food, echoing verses 11–12.

At the end of the sixth day, God pronounced His creations “very good” (*tov m’ōd*).

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