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The Discipline of Teaching

As students and teachers of God’s Word, it is important that we are able to demonstrate good spiritual discipline. An important part of that discipline is the study of Scripture. As teachers, we owe it to our students to be well prepared so that we can help them in their walk with Christ.

I can think of no better way than through the study of the Holy Bible. As educators, we have the responsibility to make the words of the Bible “come alive on the pages.” Through research and proper exegetical exercise, we are able to accomplish this. We must properly prepare the text so that our students understand the message that God wants to convey to us.

Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2:15 to “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (KJV). The word “study” in Greek means “to make effort, be prompt, give diligence.” When we study the Bible, we have to focus on making sure that we are looking at the Scripture in its proper perspective. That means using available tools to get a clear understanding of what that Scripture means. But first and foremost, we must allow the Scripture to interpret itself before seeking outside resources.

The Biblical Story

The Bible tells a story. In essence, it tells us the history of salvation. From the beginning of time, Jesus Christ, our Savior, was coming to redeem us from a life of sin and death. The Bible tells the story of how this came to pass. Key events and people in the Bible help us to understand the great sacrifice that God made so that we can see Him again one day.

The Bible is full of lessons that we need to learn to understand the truth. For clarity, we need to begin our study at the beginning. Genesis, the first book of the Bible, sets the tone and the pace for the story. It introduces us to key concepts and themes that continue throughout the Bible. Although many themes are introduced in Genesis, four are key to our understanding of the Bible: Covenant, Sin and Redemption, Salvation, and Faith. Let’s take a look at each so that we can understand their importance to our lives and those of our students.

Theme 1: Covenant

A covenant is defined as a binding agreement between two parties that creates a new relationship. Oftentimes, a promise is involved as well. In a biblical covenant, the agreement is between God and man. The covenantal relationship is carried throughout the entire Bible.
The explanation of covenant begins in Genesis 6 with Noah. God was about to destroy the world and everything in it. He decided that Noah, along with his family and two of every animal species should be saved, so He instructed Noah to build an ark to survive the coming flood. Once the ark was built, Noah’s family and the animals entered and were shut in for forty days and nights. When the waters subsided, the ark was opened and all that were inside came out. God promised Noah that He would never destroy the earth with water again (Genesis 9:8–17). He gave them a symbol, the rainbow, as a seal of what He had promised.

The concept of covenant continues in Genesis 12 with Abram. God instructed Abram to leave the land he was in and go to an unfamiliar land. God was going to bless him and make his name great. Without hesitation, Abram prepared his family and belongings, and journeyed to unfamiliar territory. He did not know where he was going, but he trusted God enough to do as told. As a result, God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, which means “father of many nations.” God was going to make Abraham a great nation with many descendants. This was a miracle in itself because Abraham had no children. God kept His Word and a son was born to Abraham and Sarah in their mature age.

God was establishing the lineage of Abraham that would have some of the greatest people of the Bible, such as Jacob, Joseph, David, and ultimately Jesus Christ. These men went on to further establish the covenant with God’s people and prepare their ancestors for Jesus.

The theme of covenant is significant because it helps us to understand what God is doing in the midst of His people and demonstrates His love for us. God will always remain true to His Word, and we must be truthful on our end. He prepared the way to send His Son to earth so that sin and death are no longer powerful over us. The Great Covenant will be fulfilled in the return of Jesus Christ.

Theme 2: Sin and Redemption

The next theme we see in Genesis is Sin and Redemption. God created Adam and Eve, placed them in the garden, and gave them full responsibility to tend to the garden and all its contents. The only instruction they received was not to eat of the tree in the middle of the garden (Genesis 2:17). The serpent came along to speak with Eve and told her that what God had said was not the truth. She disobeyed the
Lord and ate the forbidden fruit. Because of this act, sin entered the world. Adam and Eve had sinned against God and defied Him. Now, they had to leave the comfort of the only home that they had ever known and were forced to fend for themselves.

Death had entered the world; separation was present. But a Redeemer was in place! Jesus Christ was to come and take eternal sin and the consequence of death from us (Genesis 3:15). He would come and die on the cross to restore our relationship with God. But till then a mediator, in the form of a priest, would intercede on behalf of the people. Sin would still be present, but now we had another opportunity to get it right in the eyes of God.

Salvation would be possible because of what Jesus was coming to the earth to do. We first see mention of salvation with Noah and his family. When God decided He was going to destroy the earth and its inhabitants, He secured Noah and his family in the ark. The ark was their salvation as it protected them during the Flood and kept them from facing death.

As born-again believers, we must understand that salvation comes through Jesus and Jesus Christ alone (Acts 4:12). Since one of the most important themes in Scripture is salvation, we as teachers must be clear on this topic. Our students must realize that accepting and acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is the only way to expect to see Him again.

**Theme 3: Faith**

Faith is interwoven throughout the Bible. We can see the first mention of this theme in Genesis. According to the Word of God, part of faith is belief in the one, true God without actually seeing Him. Faith is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9). We obtain faith by the power of our own freewill. It distinguishes who belongs to God and who does not. Faith keeps us until the end, because we know that we will see Him again and live with Him forever. We must be steadfast in our faith, the very thing that keeps us going from day to day.

Our first example of this great faith is Noah. He was told by God to build an ark to protect himself and his family from the rain that was going to destroy everything. Noah had never seen rain, but by faith, he built the ark and had it ready to go when destruction came. As believers, we have to understand that God loves us and will give us His best. But we must strive to be obedient and live by faith.

Abraham also exhibited faith. By faith, Abraham moved his entire family from the familiar to the unfamiliar. God promised and gave him a son, Isaac, despite the obstacles that appeared to be present. By faith, Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son of the promise. Because of Abraham’s faith, God established a covenant with Abraham that would last for generations, culminating with the birth of Jesus Christ.

The book of Genesis provides us with a wealth of insight as to who God is. When studying Genesis, note the many “firsts” that occur. All of them help us to realize who we are and who we may become. Our students will find great value in the work that we do to help them understand these important principles, as they provide guidelines for how we should live. Our students must never shy away from any book in the Old Testament, because we need to understand our beginning in order to embrace our future.

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Sarah Breedlove's parents were former slaves who sharecropped in the Louisiana Delta. They had died by the time she was seven years old, so Sarah was shifted from one family to the next until she went to live with her sister Louvina and Louvina's husband, Willie Powell.

Willie began abusing her, so she ran away and married Moses McWilliams when she was just fourteen years old. They had one daughter, Lelia, before McWilliams' death.

Sarah worked hard as a laundrywoman to provide for herself and Lelia, and her daughter's education. She joined the St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church where she sang in the choir.

She was greatly influenced by some of the Christian women who were members of that church. At this time she developed a scalp ailment that caused her to start losing her hair. Sarah began experimenting with various ingredients to create products specifically for the hair of African American women.

In St. Louis, she met and married Charles Joseph (“C.J.”) Walker and began calling herself and her company Madam C.J. Walker. Mr. Walker was a newspaperman with a talent for marketing. He started placing advertisements for her hair products in African American newspapers throughout the United States. She was hired by Annie Turnbo Malone, a successful African American haircare entrepreneur, as a commission agent in 1905. When her brother died, she moved to Denver, Colorado. After branching out with her own business, she and her husband toured to various cities demonstrating the “Walker Method” of haircare using hot combs, brushing, and her special hair pomade. Madam C.J. Walker had a great vision for the growth of her company but her husband disagreed. They divorced. However, he stayed on as a sales agent. One of his ideas was door-to-door marketing, which was very good for the growth of the business.

By 1906, the company had grown greatly. She brought on her daughter Lelia, (later A'Lelia Walker), who had just graduated from college. Lelia ran the business from the office while Madam Walker traveled throughout the country, Latin America, and the Caribbean to market her products and develop new ones. She also started a college to train women in how to use and sell the products. By 1910, she had 1,000 sales agents and moved Walker Manufacturing Company to Indianapolis, Indiana. The company continued growing.

After all the suffering, poverty, and hardship she had endured, Madam C.J. Walker was the first woman, black or white, to become a millionaire based upon her own achievements.

Sources:
Words You Should Know

A. Firmament *raqiya* (Heb.)—Heaven, sky.
B. Spirit *ruakh* (Heb.)—Wind, breath.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Out of the Darkness.
The wonders of the universe amaze even the keenest of human minds. Who is responsible for such marvelous and breathtaking creativity? Genesis 1 tells us that God is the Creator of all these marvelous wonders.

A. Read the Bible Background and Devotional Readings.
B. Pray for your students and for lesson clarity.
C. Read the lesson Scripture in multiple translations.
D. Invite members of the class to bring nature pictures they have taken and work together to create a display that your faith community can enjoy. Provide opportunities for them to identify the images and explain how they affirm their faith in the Creator God. Suggest that they label the images with qualities and characteristics of God that the images reflect: strength, beauty, love, care, faithfulness, for example.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Begin the class with prayer.
B. Have the students read the Aim for Change.
C. Ask students how events in the story can weigh on their hearts and how they can view these events from a theological perspective.
D. Have students read the In Focus Story.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Read the Focal Verses and discuss the Background and The People, Places, and Times sections.
B. Have the class share what Scriptures jump out for them and why, with particular emphasis on today's context.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Use More Light on the Text to help stimulate in-depth discussion of the lesson text.
B. Discuss the Liberating Lesson and Application for Activation sections

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Summarize the value of knowing God as Sovereign Creator.
B. End class with a commitment to pray for families, natural resources, and scientists.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher
Theme: God Created the Heavens and Earth
Song: “Holy Holy Holy”
Devotional Reading: Psalm 33:1–9
God Created the Heavens and Earth

Bible Background • GENESIS 1:1–13
Printed Text • GENESIS 1:1–13 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 33:1–9

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: ACKNOWLEDGE God as creator of the universe; APPRECIATE the created world; and ADMIRE the beauty of the heavens and the earth God created.

In Focus

Alyse had always wanted to be a scientist. As a child, she would take her telescope outside with her father and look at the stars through it with wonder. Her father, a physicist, was part of her inspiration for pursuing natural science as a major in college. However, as she approached her senior year, she started having doubts about science after hearing a classmate say that he believed in science so he didn’t believe in God. Alyse decided to talk to her dad about her dilemma. “How can you be a scientist and still believe in God, Dad?” she asked nervously.

Her father responded, “Alyse, science helps us understand our world, not give it meaning. I started doing physics because of my faith in God. I wanted to understand how this amazing world we live in works. I don’t think that wondering and investigating how creation works bothers God. But at the end of the day, science is about asking questions and getting an understanding of what we see. It does not try to understand the meaning of life or the things that matter most to me, like the love I have for you and your mom. I have faith in God for those things.”

Alyse was in awe. She decided that with her faith in God she could stay on her path to becoming a scientist and understanding God’s creation.

What do you appreciate most about God’s creation?

Keep in Mind

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:1–2, KJV).
“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2, NLT).
Focal Verses

**KJV** Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.
5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.
6 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.
7 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.
8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.
9 And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.
10 And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.
11 And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.
12 And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.
13 And the evening and the morning were the third day.

**NLT** Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
2 The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.
3 Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.
4 And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness.
5 God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.” And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.
6 Then God said, “Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth.”
7 And that is what happened. God made this space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens.
8 God called the space “sky.” And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.
9 Then God said, “Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear.” And that is what happened.
10 God called the dry ground “land” and the waters “seas.” And God saw that it was good.
11 Then God said, “Let the land sprout with vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” And that is what happened.
12 The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.
13 And evening passed and morning came, marking the third day.
The People, Places, and Times

Creation. The act of God by which the universe came into being is Creation. The Bible's chief account of Creation is Genesis 1:1–2:3. Instead of divine combat and struggle with a willful prehistoric force as other ancient cultures believed, Genesis tells of the sole, sovereign Master of the universe directing the work of Creation by verbal command. God is shown here making the world in six days and resting on the seventh. Bible scholars differ on whether the "days" were 24-hour days or longer periods.

Background

Genesis is the first book in the Bible, the first book in what is called the Torah, or Law, for the Jewish people. Genesis sets the foundation for understanding the rest of the Scriptures. In Genesis 1, we see the power of God as Creator of the universe who creates from nothing, bringing order to the chaos of nothingness. God exists apart from creation as God alone, not marked by time, space, or any other measurement. God is self-existent, all-powerful, and eternal. God also establishes cycles and patterns that make up nature and assigns the functions of each aspect of creation, from time to growth. Through creation, God shows that He is both orderly and creative. It is important to know that God calls not only creation itself good but also the relationships He establishes for the created order. The goodness and order of these relationships in the created world are challenged by the introduction of sin into the world.

Is there a story of how something started that has particularly affected you?

In Depth

1. God is Creator ( Genesis 1:1–2)

God exists in eternity beyond time and space (Isaiah 57:15). God is eternal and limitless, but the book of Genesis begins with the account of Creation. God creates all that exists in the visible world, the heavens and the earth. The beginning here is the start of history, as eternity does not have a beginning or ending. God has not entered Creation, time, or space, but is acting on it by creating at this point in the story.God is Spirit and is the source of everything. God created the world and goes through the process of bringing order to it. This account of Creation in Genesis helps us know that God is the one who has created everything, and the one who can bring order to formless chaos. The earth was undifferentiated nothingness, as the Scripture says “without form, and void” (from v. 2). God is also revealed here as Spirit. God is not a created being, but Creator of the universe by God's Spirit. The Spirit of God moved in darkness before speaking light into manifestation in verse 3.

What impact does knowing about God's creativity have on your own understanding of creativity?

2. God Creates Light (vv. 3–5)

God speaks creation into existence. The power of God’s Word is that whatever God commands must be. God speaks and creation obeys. The first thing God speaks into the visible world is light. We know from science that nothing is visible to human eyes without light.
God creates light and calls the light good; God is pleased with His creation. Then God separates light from darkness and gives them names, Day and Night, and purpose. Everything that God creates has a purpose because God gives purpose to it. God creates the cycle of night and day to define how time will be viewed on earth.

What roles have light and darkness played in your life?

3. God Creates Heaven (vv. 6–8)

God speaks heaven into existence as a firmament or barrier. The word for heaven here refers to the space between the ground and the upper atmosphere, what we would typically call the sky, but also could mean more than that. The sky separates the earth and its waters from waters in earth’s upper atmosphere and the vast expanse of space beyond it. This continues God’s pattern of creating and establishing order, creating boundaries between things in the created world so that the world can exist in established relationships instead of jumbled chaos.

How can natural boundaries be seen as good on the earth?

4. God Creates Earth (vv. 9–13)

In earth-shaking fashion, God calls the waters on the earth together—and the land up from the waters. God gives them purpose by naming them seas and earth and calling them and their relationship with one another good. God’s creative intentionality is on full display. Then, God creates plant life; He calls it to grow out of the earth and gives each plant the ability to reproduce by using its seed. Each plant produces according to its own kind; that is to say an orange tree produces oranges instead of apples. There is intentional diversity in God’s creation. Not every plant is the same, but they all reproduce according to their species. God once again calls these creations and their relationships with the rest of the earth good.

How does knowing that God created diversity influence what we think of as differences in life?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why do you think the Scripture keeps repeating the phrase “God saw that it was good,” after God creates each part of the universe (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12)?
2. Why do you think God calls plants to grow out of the earth instead of simply speaking them into existence (v. 11)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. God creates by speaking everything into existence. What impact does that have on how we view the power of God’s Word?
2. How do you reconcile your understanding of science with your faith as a Christian? Do you believe in any aspects of evolution? Why, or why not?

Liberating Lesson

The Bible makes it clear that God is the Creator of the universe. God not only is the source of everything created, but He gives everything purpose and function. Yet God is distinctive in making different parts of creation unique, even allowing the earth to bring forth plants that naturally reproduce. God is purposeful and intentional in establishing diversity and boundaries in nature. As a result of the perfect wisdom of God, the visible world has good relationships between all created things despite their differences. We can observe this and conclude that we as humans should also value and appreciate the purpose of all things in nature from plants to animals, day and night, and water and land. We can also use God’s example of setting boundaries in our lives as perhaps good for us.
Application for Activation
Pause a moment to take in nature. Go for a walk, look at the sky, tend to a garden. Be intentional this week about engaging the natural world and thanking God for creation. Understand that God is the source of your life; everything that exists gives important meaning to what you can experience with your senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

Reflect on beginnings. What good is there in the beginning of something in your life? How can you work with people in your community to begin something new for everyone's benefit, such as a community garden? How can you show your appreciation for God's goodness in nature?

Follow the Spirit
What God wants me to do:


Remember Your Thoughts
Special insights I have learned:


More Light on the Text
Genesis 1:1–13
1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

The opening statement of the Bible declares, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” There are a few important embedded assumptions in this statement that are foundational to the Christian understanding of the universe. The first assumption is that “the beginning” here speaks to the beginning of history, the start of time. God exists in eternity beyond time. God does not have a beginning or end, God simply is. The beginning here gives context to the account of God creating the universe that follows. This beginning is the edge of human understanding that looks forward toward Creation; and the other side of the beginning looks backward, prior to human history, into the expanse of eternity mentioned in John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word…”

The word for God here in Genesis is the Hebrew word Elohim, which is plural, which many Christian scholars argue is a revelation of God as Triune (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

The word “created” here is the Hebrew bara’ (bah-RAH), which communicates God being the source of Creation. This statement reveals the position of God as creator and an attribute of God as creative. The Bible contends that God is responsible for the existence of the heavens and the earth. It did not happen by accident or without intention. God created the universe on purpose. The opening statement of Genesis gives context for the story that follows; this is a story about God in relationship with heaven and earth.

The Bible assumes God exists; it is not a matter of debate or uncertainty: It is a given. Prior to the Enlightenment in 18th century Europe, this was an assumption that almost every culture in human history shared. Until the 20th century, there was no significant atheism that
denied the existence of God. We understand, as believers, that without God nothing exists. Without the decision of faith that God exists the rest of the Scriptures cannot be understood and the relationship that we have with God is incomprehensible. It is impossible to please God, let alone communicate or have right relationship with God, without this foundational assumption of God’s existence (Hebrews 11:6). This is the departure point for atheists: If one does not acknowledge the existence of God, then they cannot easily relate to God. In an increasingly secular, pluralistic society, Christians must know it is a faith decision to believe in God. God exists, and everything else flows from God’s existence. If God exists, it does not matter if humans believe in God or not, or if they question God. They are still subject to God because He created everything and transcends humanity (Job 38).

In Genesis 1:2, we are told Creation was “without form, and void,” which conveys the truth of the Earth being in an early stage of chaos. The text presents the Creation as undifferentiated and disordered. The Creation is not yet capable of producing life. The text goes on to report the gradual unfolding and development of the Creation. The Spirit “moved” This is the first reference to the Spirit of God in the Bible. The term for spirit, ruakh (ROO-akh), also translated as “wind or breath,” can be thought of as something like moving air. In this instance, the Spirit of God is present and ready to bring order to the formless Creation and to prepare the earth for habitation.

The implications of this verse in our modern context are remarkable. Many people debate whether there is a gap in time between verse 1 and verse 2 because it moves from creation to chaos that is reorganized. Some then contend that this is a re-creation in verse 2. The text itself does not worry about such a possibility. God created ex nihilo or from nothing. Some Christian apologists argue that this verse leaves room for evolution, that God creating would manifest as the evolutionary process: from nothingness taking form into something-ness as God speaks. Scientists are consistently astounded by the extreme circumstances that had to be fulfilled for our universe to exist as we know it—trillions of variables that had to act together in specific ways for the universe to function the way it does. The Scripture however is simply advancing the account of God and Creation. The account reveals another function of God: to bring order to chaos.

3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. 4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. 5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

Just the word “light,” translating the common Hebrew word ֑֜(ORE), implies God, because He Himself is Light (1 John 1:5). Today we know human, plant, and animal life are all impossible without light. He spoke every aspect of known visible light into being, and it was so. What God commands, happens (Psalm 33:9). This sets a precedent for the power of the Word of God that is carried out through the rest of Scripture. All that exists came into existence by the spoken word of God (Hebrews 11:3).

It is also important to note that in Genesis 1, God creates by differentiating. God establishes order and right relationships by creating boundaries, an action of God that plays a major role in much of Bible. Boundaries and order are good; in creation they create right relationships between things. God separates light from darkness, day from night, and brings order to the chaos.

“Darkness” is from the Hebrew word khoshek (kho-SHEK). Though some contend that
darkness always represents evil, at Creation God takes the darkness that covered the formless void and calls it “night” (Heb. *layil*, LAH-yil). Today, we know sleep is a vital part of life; humans not only need sleep but the rest of creation requires regular rest cycles as well. The absence of balanced light and darkness cycles is a major cause of seasonal affective disorder (SAD), and light therapy is often used to treat it and other forms of seasonal depression. The light and darkness forms day and night. God continues to differentiate His creation and assign specific functions. He created for His world “morning” and “evening.” The combined cycle creates the very first complete “day” or *yom* (Heb. YOME), a word that contains a concept of time.

The debate is hot over the use of the word “day” in Genesis 1. Depending upon the context, it may mean what we conventionally understand to be a 24-hour period, or it may refer to an epoch or a period of time. God’s perspective on time is not the same as a human perspective; a day to God could be thousands of years to humanity (2 Peter 3:8). In this text, it certainly refers to God’s decision to act within a certain time frame. God dwells in eternity but acts in history for the sake of Creation. With that in mind, we must think of the text as indicating that God created within a particular frame of time, which could have been seven days, epochs, or periods of work. The seventh “day” was designated as rest (Exodus 31:15). Whichever it was, we must remember that the aim of the text is to tell us that the one true God created everything, not to determine when He performed this act.

The order of the day/night cycle here can be easily overlooked: first evening and then morning. The view of night as the beginning of a day continues throughout the Bible. The night to day cycle of counting days is reflected in the development of Israel’s calendar and that of other nearby cultures that were organized on a lunar calendar. One implication of this cycle is daily hope; the darkness will always give way to the light within the same day (cf. Psalm 30:5). Creation moves from darkness to light.

6 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. 7 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. 8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

At this stage of Creation, the waters separate, apparently making the distinction between liquid and vapor forms, and the atmosphere as we know it is called into existence. “Firmament” (Heb. *raqiya‘*, rah-KEE-ah) is used only seventeen times in the Old Testament. Although the word can refer to where birds fly (Genesis 1:20), it usually refers to more than air. It is used as being “heavenly” in Psalm 150:1: “Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.”

Reinforcing these uses of *raqiya‘*, God called the atmosphere “heaven” (Heb. *shamayim*, shaw-MAH-yim), a word that is used 420 times in the Bible. Although “Heaven” is most often used like “firmament” to refer to God’s abode or a divine place beyond Earth (Genesis 22:15; Psalm 8:1; Psalm 11:4), *shamayim* is also a place where birds fly (Genesis 7:3; Job 35:11) and clouds can be seen (Job 38:37).

9 And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. 10 And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. 11 And God said, Let the earth bring forth
grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. 12 And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. 13 And the evening and the morning were the third day.

One might think of “gathering together” as implying an orderly, even gentle act. However, the thought of the oceans of the world being gathered, while at the same time being separated from dry land, doesn’t necessarily evoke the image of a gentle act. Rather, it brings to mind a violent, explosive, even volcanic act of giant mountainous upheavals combined with equally deep gouging from the various waterways and bodies of water.

It is interesting to note that all the earth’s vegetation wasn’t created instantly but grew out of the soil. For all the water and dry land in the world to be sorted out in a day, the evolutionary timescale for wear and tear on rocks from water must have been radically increased. This could only have been done by God’s power. “Brought forth” is from the Hebrew word yatsa (yah-TSAH), which has several meanings including “growing vegetation” (Psalm 104:14). It is not surprising that God could grow trees overnight or order land and soil into existence from a formless void. Verse 12 points out that growth is a purposeful part of God’s creation. Although God could have simply spoken or created each type of plant life, God instead allows each to grow from the earth through reproduction. The herbs yield seed and the trees yield fruit after their kind. Each part of creation is created to reproduce itself; God sets in motion a cycle of reproduction, and calls it good. Seeds are the means by which God chooses to let creation multiply. Growth and multiplication are part of God’s creation before and after the introduction of sin and death.

It is awesome that God declares the natural world He has created as good, and the relationships and cycles in the natural world good. Scripture highlights the order of nature as valuable even before humankind is introduced to creation: The universe and the earth have value to God on their own as good creations. The complex systems we know today that make up the natural world are extremely delicate yet function consistently in orderly cycles as God created them to do. The natural sciences—such as biology, astronomy, chemistry, and physics—are all designed to help humanity understand the wonderful world that God has created.

Sources:
Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY
In Your Suffering Trust the Creator
(1 Peter 4:15–19)

TUESDAY
Renewed by the Creator
(Colossians 3:8–11)

WEDNESDAY
God Provides the Water
(Isaiah 41:17–20)

THURSDAY
The Wind and Water Obey Voice of Jesus
(Mark 4:35–41)

FRIDAY
God Sends the Rain to Everyone
(Matthew 5:43–48)

SATURDAY
God Is Great; God Is Good
(Psalm 33:1–9)

SUNDAY
God Created the Heavens and Earth
(Genesis 1:1–13)

Notes