



52 STEPS

through the mountain peaks
of the Bible story

Part 1 ► "In the Beginning"

Through the Bible runs a single story. It's a drama in four acts:

● **Act 1—the Good** God creates the universe—the Earth and the heavens. He creates all the living things on our planet. And He creates the first humans, Adam and Eve. Everything is good—very good. Genesis chapters 1 and 2 tell the story.

● **Act 2—the Bad** An evil angel called Satan tempts Adam and Eve, and they rebel against God. That brings catastrophe upon mankind and upon the natural world. We read this in Genesis chapter 3.



● **Act 3—the New** In our suffering world soiled by sin, God does a new thing. Step by step, our holy, loving God puts right all the consequences of our rebellion against Him. He conquers Satan and all his evil forces. This is by far the longest act. It begins in Genesis chapter 4; it ends in the last book of the Bible, Revelation, chapter 20.

● **Act 4—the Perfect** God transforms Heaven and Earth. God's people now live with Him on the renewed Earth. It's literally Heaven on Earth. God's creation will never be troubled by Satan or sin again. We read this in Revelation chapters 21 and 22.

That's the Bible story in a nutshell: the good, the bad, the new, and the perfect.^[1]

"God created the heavens and the earth"

And so we begin Act 1—'the Good'. In the first two chapters of Genesis, God tells us how He made everything. He tells us, not in scientific language, but in simple language that everyone can understand.

How exactly did God create the universe? Christians have different views about this. For example, some think the six days of creation are literally days of 24 hours. Others think they're six long periods of time. And what about the theory of evolution? Did living things slowly evolve from lower life-forms over many millions of years? Some Christians believe they did; others disagree.

We can at least be certain of these four things: ♦ The Bible (in its original languages) is perfectly accurate and without error. ♦ This Universe didn't come into being by chance. *God* designed it and made it. ♦ God created the world stage by stage. ♦ God created the first man and woman as His final and crowning act.

The creation account is in three parts:

- **Genesis 1:1** This verse tells us that God created everything—both this Universe and the heavenly realms we can't see.
- **Genesis 1:2-2:3** God (so to speak) 'zooms in' on this Earth. It's a dark lifeless ball. Step by step God transforms it into our beautiful world lit by sun and moon, and by stars and galaxies that stretch for unimaginable distances into space. And He creates mankind to fill it and have dominion over it. He does this in six days, and rests on the seventh day.
- **Genesis 2:4-25** God 'zooms in' even more closely to a specific region on Earth. He gives us an intimate and more detailed view of how He made Adam and Eve and of the paradise that was to be their home.

"In the beginning"

Genesis chapter 1 verse 1 tells us: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." This phrase "the heavens and the earth" probably means 'the entire universe', including the Earth, the sun, the moon, the planets and all the stars. The "heavens" likely also includes the invisible heavenly realms where God's holy angels live. And entrenched in another invisible heavenly realm are spiritual forces of evil headed up by the evil angel Satan. We can't see these heavenly places. But they're every bit as real as the world around us. We can think of them as another dimension of God's creation.

Our perspective changes. Now God 'zooms in' onto planet Earth. But Earth isn't finished. It's "formless and empty" (Genesis 1:2 NIV). It's a dark and lifeless world, completely covered by a vast ocean.

So, if you had been on Earth at that time, you'd have been in total darkness. You'd have seen no stars or moon or sun. It seems likely they already existed (the previous verse suggests that). If so, the Earth must have been shielded from their light, perhaps by a thick blanket of water

vapour (cloud)—so thick that *all* light was shut out. We seem to be seeing the creation events take place around us as if we *ourselves* were present there on Earth's surface.

How long was the Earth like this? We don't know. But "**the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters**" (Genesis 1:2). He was waiting to bring light and order and life and beauty to this dark and watery world.



[Pillars of Creation](#) by NASA

Detail from a photograph taken by the Hubble Space Telescope. It shows interstellar gas and dust in the Eagle Nebula, some 7,000 light years from Earth. The photograph is named *The Pillars of Creation* because the gas and dust are in the process of creating new stars, while also being eroded by the light from nearby stars that have recently formed. This photograph, unveiled in 2015, was produced using near-infrared and visible light exposure.

Organising the Earth

The Earth was "**formless**"; so God gives it **form**. He brings order. He organises things.

● **Day 1** At God's command, light floods our world. God separates the light from darkness: the light He calls "**day**", and the darkness "**night**". But still no sun or moon or stars appear. It seems that clouds still envelop the Earth. But this cloud now thins out. It's like a cloudy day. The sun's light illuminates the ocean below. But the sun itself still can't be seen.

Notice how God creates. He creates through His *word*. God *spoke* our world into being. God's word is inexhaustibly creative, infinitely powerful.

● **Day 2** God creates an expanse in the midst of the waters. He calls this expanse "**the sky**" (Genesis 1:8 NIV). The waters above the expanse seem to be the clouds. The waters below become the sea.

● **Day 3** God gathers the waters of the sea together. Dry land appears.

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Filling the Earth

But the Earth is still "empty". So God fills it.

● **Day 3** Earlier on this day, dry land appeared. Now God fills the land with vegetation.

● **Day 4** God fills the sky with sun and moon and stars. As we've said, it's likely that the sun, moon and stars already existed. Perhaps now God commands the clouds to part. The sun appears by day; the moon and stars by night. God has now 'appointed' them to rule the day and night. The passage of these heavenly bodies through the sky can now be used—as verse 14 suggests—to track days and seasons and years.

● **Day 5** God fills the waters with living creatures. He creates birds to fill the skies. And He commands the earth to bring forth "the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals" (Genesis 1:24 NIV).

● **Day 6** Then we 'overhear' God as He plans His final creative masterstroke. He says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion . . .". God doesn't speak like this at any other point in creation. He now creates something different from anything He's made before. He creates mankind in his own likeness—male and female. And notice that God *speaks* to mankind. *He relates to them*. From the very beginning, God created us to live in relationship with Him.

All Three Persons of the Trinity took part in creation. **The Father** purposed and designed the universe (see 1 Corinthians 8:6). He created it through **the Son** (Hebrews 1:2, Colossians 1:16 and John 1:1-3). And He did it by the agency of **the Holy Spirit**, whom we see here hovering over the waters. And when God says "Let us make man in our image . . ." we seem to be overhearing the Triune God speaking with Himself before His final creative masterstroke.

So God finishes His creative work. He pronounces it "very good". On the seventh day, He rests. Of course, God isn't tired. It's simply that everything is finished. All is now exactly as He wants it to be.

In the next part . . .

We'll look at Genesis 2:4-25. We'll see how God created the first man and woman, and how they were to relate to each other as man and wife. And we'll look at humanity's first home—the garden of Eden.

Bible Reading and Question

You may like to read Genesis 1:1-31. Here's a question to think about:

? The description of how God made man differs from the description of how He made everything else. In what ways? And what does that teach us about ourselves.