

## **As It Was in the Beginning**

Menno Mennonite Church  
May 31, 2026

**Purpose:** To explore the ways in which our creation connects us to who God makes us to be.

**Message:** From the beginning God connects us to the image of the universe that God intends.

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:1-2:4 (I will read), Matthew 28:16-20

Commentary: <https://share.evernote.com/note/edb1cf72-0444-449f-8f0b-4bf70003ba09>

**Synopsis:** There are many stories of the beginning. It is a fundamental curiosity of human kind to know and understand. Many of the stories not only explain how things came to be but also why society works the way it does. This is part of what makes the YHWH creation so unique. God makes everyone in the image of God, not just the powerful and the king. Creation begins with the first person that is not the pivotal person of the story. These connections, construct not just the world but also our role and place in it, connecting all people to the intentions God has for the universe.

## Genesis 1:1 -2:4

1 When God began to create the heavens and the earth—  
2 the earth was without shape or form,  
it was dark over the deep sea,  
and God's wind swept over the waters—<sup>3</sup>

God said, "Let there be light." And so light appeared.

<sup>4</sup> God saw how good the light was. God separated the light from the darkness.

<sup>5</sup> God named the light Day and the darkness Night.

There was evening and there was morning: the first day.

<sup>6</sup> God said, "Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters  
to separate the waters from each other."

<sup>7</sup> God made the dome and separated the waters under the dome  
from the waters above the dome.

And it happened in that way. <sup>8</sup> God named the dome Sky.

There was evening and there was morning: the second day.

<sup>9</sup> God said, "Let the waters under the sky  
come together into one place so that the dry land can appear."  
And that's what happened.

<sup>10</sup> God named the dry land Earth,  
and he named the gathered waters Seas.  
God saw how good it was.

<sup>11</sup> God said, "Let the earth grow plant life:  
plants yielding seeds and fruit trees bearing fruit with seeds inside it,  
each according to its kind throughout the earth."  
And that's what happened.

<sup>12</sup> The earth produced plant life: plants yielding seeds,  
each according to its kind, and trees bearing fruit with seeds inside it,  
each according to its kind.  
God saw how good it was.

<sup>13</sup> There was evening and there was morning: the third day.

<sup>14</sup> God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky  
to separate the day from the night.  
They will mark events, sacred seasons, days, and years.

<sup>15</sup> They will be lights in the dome of the sky to shine on the earth."  
And that's what happened.

<sup>16</sup> God made the stars and two great lights:  
the larger light to rule over the day  
and the smaller light to rule over the night.

<sup>17</sup> God put them in the dome of the sky to shine on the earth,

<sup>18</sup> to rule over the day and over the night,  
and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw how good it was.

<sup>19</sup> There was evening and there was morning: the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup> God said, “Let the waters swarm with living things,  
and let birds fly above the earth up in the dome of the sky.”

<sup>21</sup> God created the great sea animals and all the tiny living things  
that swarm in the waters, each according to its kind,  
and all the winged birds, each according to its kind.

God saw how good it was. <sup>22</sup> Then God blessed them:  
“Be fertile and multiply and fill the waters in the seas,  
and let the birds multiply on the earth.”

<sup>23</sup> There was evening and there was morning: the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup> God said, “Let the earth produce every kind of living thing:  
livestock, crawling things, and wildlife.” And that’s what happened.

<sup>25</sup> God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock,  
and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground.

God saw how good it was.

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make humanity in our image  
to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea,  
the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth.”

<sup>27</sup> God created humanity  
in God’s own image,  
in the divine image God created them,  
male and female God created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them,  
“Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it.  
Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground.”

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, “I now give to you all the plants on the earth  
that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it.  
These will be your food.

<sup>30</sup> To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground  
—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food.”  
And that’s what happened.

<sup>31</sup> God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good.  
There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.

2 The heavens and the earth and all who live in them were completed.  
On the sixth day God completed all the work that he had done,  
and on the seventh day God rested from all the work that he had done.

<sup>3</sup> God blessed the seventh day and made it holy,  
because on it God rested from all the work of creation.

<sup>4</sup> This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Origins matter. We know this to be true. It is the back story that creates and makes us who we are and the stories we love that much more rich and rewarding. Spider Man was importantly bitten by a radioactive spider. That is what starts the whole super strength web slinging mayhem that makes it a fun story, and a whole new category of super powers that we might consider when we go through the catalog and think “wouldn’t it be nice if.” But equally, if not more important is that at the very time Peter Parker is becoming a super hero he experiences loss that he is powerless to stop and too weak to cure. He loses his father figure in his Uncle Ben who teaches with his final breath that “with great power comes great responsibility.” That makes the rest of the story and the whole universes that spring from them worth pondering and considering. Without that moral and difficult lesson, the whole story unspools quite differently. So ends my excursion into graphic novel universes. I promise.

This is no less true in social structures. Our origin stories matter a great deal. It positions us within time and space. It tells of the way that the world was created, especially for the group and culture that is telling the story would have it be told. It is the bedrock for the way that the world is MEANT to be and how things ought to be constructed, often taking great pains to setup the reasons why the King was the King and the logic of the dynasty coming from the gods to make the divine right to rule the created order, not just the imperative. Most accounts of creation speak of the power of the divine and the ways that they relied on the semi-gods (the aristocracy) to help them keep the world from falling apart (sometimes literally). One case in point would be the Enuma Elish from Ancient Babylon. This story is often held up against the biblical creation as it shares some common notions: before creation the universe is a swirling and confused waters, there is a division between the waters to bring about creation, among other similar notions. Otherwise, though it departs wildly as it basically involves a cosmic battle among the gods where the victorious god (who just happened to bear the name of the king) creates by destroying the other gods and laying them open to create the heavens and earth. The very creation establishes the right to rule and the land upon which to rule. This is way more similar than not in the broad ways that the origins of the world are told by the various people that tell them.

All of which is why the YHWH creation story is so different and important. We are so very familiar with the words and the rhythms that we take it all for granted. Sometimes we can get so wound up about the whys and wherefores of the nature of creation over and against the ways and means of science that we can easily miss some of the important things that Genesis does say about the world, about how and why we are created and, most importantly, about God.

In looking at this week's sermon I came across an article I clipped from the *Christian Century* written by Rabbi Shai Held in 2018.<sup>1</sup> It sparked a great deal of the thinking that comes after and I must doff my hat to Rabbi Held as I step into this. Because the story of the 6 days and rest and the pronouncing it good is so well part of our world and upkeep, we don't often think about the world that this narrative creates for us to inhabit. It is not just one with a sky on one hand and water on the other, or even how and when we were created. It also creates a moral universe for us to inhabit with its meaning about the nature of both creation and how we are created and, by extension, the one who created it. In its form and structure it tells us how the world is meant to be and begins the story of how God's creation and kingdom would come to pass. Some of this pushes us in some new and important ways.

Let's start here. We know that many of the creation stories of the time and place speaks to the gods creating the kings to rule over the world and mediate the blessings to the world. Let's look at verse 26 and 27. What YHWH is creating here is all of humanity being made and placed in the very image of YHWH God. To put it another way, in Genesis it is we—all of us—that are created as the kings and queens. Every last one of us. That puts a bit of different spin on things. Similarly ancient Near East text often speak within the creations of the culmination being the rise of the nation that the story comes from. But the Bible rejects this. Genesis one leaves us with the creation of Adam and Eve. Abraham and the promise to Israel is nowhere yet in evidence. There is no establishment of land and proper right to rule. The nation arises not from the primordial intent of YHWH from the very beginning, but from God's intent for the nation to bless the whole of the world out of the growing relationship in the story yet to come. Even more so, YHWH embraces a multitude of thoughts and actions even down to the tower of Babel. No matter what you make of this story it cannot be made into the God of universe picking one group over another, but rather whole of the world is seen as one.

This means that the whole of creation from the very beginning is constructed around and for God's good plan to be about the business of creating a world first, not a system of power and governance. That is part of what makes the Judeo Christian vision a different one. The Spirit of Genesis 1 goes out of its way to relate all people to the one person: Adam, the literal son of the Earth (Adam almost directly translating literally to earth man from the Hebrew). The rabbinic tradition holds that YHWH created Adam singly "so that no one may say to another, 'My father

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<sup>1</sup> In *Genesis 1, We're All Royalty* Christian Century October 30, 2018, accessed online

was greater than your father.” Just as theologically speaking we are all descended from one Father, so humanly speaking are we all descended from one father. And biblically speaking, racism and bigotry in all their forms are sins, indicative of a brazen denial of God as creator of all. The text goes out of its way to stress the “male and female God created them.” So the same disconnect applies to sexism as well. God creates us in God’s image, and as such we are invested with the power of the living God and the responsibilities that this implies.

Imagine the world as it would be were we to live the fullness of these basic assumptions being realized in our day-to-day lives. How might our world work differently if we would far more routinely remember not only that every person we come across—EVERY ONE—is the very image of God regardless of class, race, creed or station. More over, to take the logic offered us by Genesis, they are created in the image of God and as such they are the very kings and queens other theologies try to reserve for the very top of the top. The whole of creation places at its center the worth and dignity of the universe simply because it is a reflection of the one who made it. At the end of all the arguing of ways and means, I think this is a far more impactful lesson to be taken from the story of all creation. It sets up a whole way of being in the world that cannot be any more revolutionary from the way that things generally are than if it tried. It needs to be said: you need to be careful reading the Bible; you never know where it might sweep you off to. From the very beginning we are given a sound case to toward the bias toward human dignity and human flourishing.

Of course we know that we are long way from such a world and such a vision. We know that we struggle to see people as God seeing, and to lay aside the valuations of people that we attach to them without even being fully aware that we are doing so. We know that too often that religion is used to reinforce our stereotypes, if not anchor them to absolute truth rather than to allow the creating Spirit of God dismantle all that would bind us and divide us. We know that the world as it was created is now fallen far from what it is meant to be. And that is a challenge that we do well to come back to time and again knowing that there is more work yet to do here.

There is another question arising out of this regal status that we are given here in the Genesis one. Contextually, the sign of the goodness of the monarch in their justice to rule was the measure of their justice in defending the poor, widow, and orphan; the people that did not fit within a structure of family, clan and class. The monarch had to take on the others being responsible for their well being as a central function of their responsibilities. It was the way the world was supposed to work. So, if the moral responsibility resides in the ones vested in with the

image of God, then what is our responsibility to work with the ways the world is so resolutely broken? How do we carry the broadly spread moral responsibility for the way that justice in this world, God's world, our world is meant to be meted out? How might we occupy this role ever better, lending our weight to this ever present need.

That is a lot for one chapter to bear. That is a lot for us to carry. But this is the beginning of the story. The rest of the story through its twists and turns is telling us how this comes to be and where this takes us as well. The Spirit that creates us does not leave us bereft, but calls us ever to the way we are created and meant to be.

May this God whose glory shows in us all be with us, creature us, and inspire us to what God is yet bringing to pass now and always.