

The Ideal World
The Primeval History, vol. 1
Genesis 1:1-2:3
Third Millennium Ministries
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*A Web-referenced Study Guide
For Groups & Individuals*



We've all responded to a friend's rosy outlook with the phrase, "Maybe that's true in an ideal world." Our friend's description doesn't square with the rough and tumble of "the real world." Still, there is something in all of us that longs for "the way things should be." Dr. Richard Pratt begins this investigation of the Bible's primeval history (Genesis 1-11) with a description of *the track God laid down* in "creation ordinances" for his "ideal world." This study guide is designed for use with Third Millennium's video series *The*

Primeval History, offering opportunities for group discussion and deeper, individual study through a variety of resources. We'll begin with an overview of Genesis 1-11. Then we'll examine the literary structure of Genesis 1-2, describing the original meaning and setting trajectories for modern application.

Part One: Overview of Primeval History

Watch the first portion of *An Ideal World* covering the subject “Overview.” After watching and taking notes on this portion of the video, you will be ready to interact with the following questions.

Let’s begin with a discussion of the creation account’s reliability, design, and purpose. The Christian’s confidence in the text is rooted in *the doctrine of inspiration*.

A. Complete Reliability

We often turn to other important passages such as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 to build our understanding that Scripture’s reliability is rooted in its divine origin. But Scripture’s reliability was known to God’s people long before the New Testament was written. List some implications of Genesis 1:1-2:3 for our understanding of Scripture’s authority in the light of this comment from Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

“That God speaks and, speaking, creates, the Bible ... mentions first where it is concerned with the creation of form, the wresting of form out of the formless. Form corresponds to the Word. The Word moves out forming, and limiting the individual, the real, the whole. The Word calls being out of non-being, so that it may be. It is an absolutely dark, completely inaccessible background that opens here behind the Word of creation. It is simply impossible for us to grasp...because the Creator is One, and we, his creatures, are created by His Word” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, p. 23).

Describe the level of authority Jesus (Matt. 19:4-6) and Paul (Rom. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 15:44b-49) placed in Moses' account. In what ways does the question of historical reliability enter into their application of the text of Genesis?

B. Literary Design

The doctrine of *organic inspiration* affirms God's use of the cultural and linguistic context, educational background, and literary conventions by particular writers. Discuss the broad literary parallels between the primeval history of Genesis 1-11 and other Ancient Near Eastern accounts of creation.

For further study: Refer to the *Internet Ancient History Sourcebook* @ www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/asbook03.html#Babylonia. Click on *Epic of Gilgamesh* under Sumeria, and *Enuma Elish* under Babylonia. Compare and contrast. Note ways that Moses interacted with them both *positively* and *negatively*.

List and discuss the three themes Dr. Pratt points out in relating Genesis 1-11 to *The Atrahasis Epic*.

For further study: Refer to the text @ www.hope.edu/bandstra/RTOT/CH1.

C. Pastoral Purpose

Ancient Near Eastern cosmology assumes that the universe is patterned after a divine wisdom. Therefore, primeval historical accounts sought to justify a particular religious and social order. In other words, the king often served as a representative of the high god(s). In a similar way, Moses, who was educated in the royal court of Egypt, sought to address the spiritual and social needs of the Exodus community through his account of God's design in creation. Which pastoral needs does he address?

Part Two: Literary Structure of Genesis 1:1-2:3.

Watch the first portion of *An Ideal World* covering the subject “Overview.” After watching and taking notes on this portion of the video, you will be ready to interact with the following questions.

Since the rise of the scientific worldview, the Genesis account of creation has attracted much controversy. Citing clear literary conventions in the text of Genesis 1:1-2:3, we gain better insights into the central teachings of this passage.

A. From Chaos to Rest

Dr. Pratt outlines the literary structure of Genesis 1:1-2:3 in a dramatic movement from the dark, chaotic World of Genesis 1:1-2 to God’s splendid order of Sabbath rest in Genesis 2:1-3. This contrast frames the central focus of the text, which is God’s six-day ordering of creation in Genesis 1:3-31. Describe the “dramatic tension” revealed when Moses opened the curtain on creation in Genesis 1:2.

B. Six Days of Ordering Creation

God counters the “formless” (*tohu*) chaos of Genesis 1:2 in Days 1, 2 and 3 by:

In a corresponding pattern of Days 4, 5, and 6, God overwhelms the “empty” (*wabohu*) chaos with:

While the notion of primordial ‘waters’ squares with other ancient Near Eastern creation accounts, Dr. Pratt draws our attention to an important way in which the biblical account is very different. Describe this difference and its significance in light of the following quote from Dr. Jon Levenson of Harvard University:

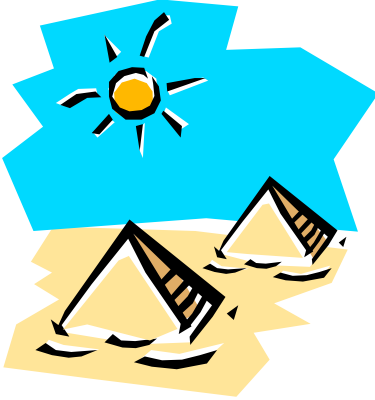
“In the Babylonian poem known as *Enuma Elish* ... the omnipotent god Marduk does battle with the violent sea goddess Tiamat and creates the world after splitting her body in half... Against this background, the placidity of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3 is remarkable, for there God is unopposed, and even the great sea monsters are His own creations... In the opening text of the Book of Genesis ... God dominates, ordering the world according to His sovereign and unchallenged will; there He is the only one who acts at all” (*Talking About Genesis: A Resource Guide*, Doubleday, 1996, p. 25).

Describe the ways in which the initial “dramatic tension” between God’s hovering Spirit and the primordial chaos is resolved. How does God express delight in His splendid order?

For further study: The highly intentional literary structure of Genesis 1:3-31, punctuated by the phrase “and God said,” has been clearly evident to nearly every reader of these verses. The corresponding pattern between Days 1, 2 and 3 on the one hand, and 4, 5 and 6 on the other hand, has also been noted by many. This has caused readers at least as early as Augustine to question the nature of these days. Those interested in a concise review of this question throughout church history, including its relation to the language of the Westminster Confession of Faith, can visit www.wts.edu/news/creation.html.

Part Three: Original Meaning

Watch the third portion of *An Ideal World* covering the subject “Original Meaning.” After watching and taking notes on this portion of the video, you will be ready to interact with the following guidelines.



A word-use study of “formless” (*tohu*) and “hovering” (*marahfet*) reveals Moses’ commentary on Genesis 1-2 in Deuteronomy 32:10-12. What parallels does Dr. Pratt draw? In what ways was God’s work in creation a prototype for what God later did in the Exodus Community?

What is the pastoral significance of Moses’ description in Deuteronomy 32 of Egypt as “barren”, and of God’s “hovering” presence with Israel in the cloud and fire?

What central dimension of Israel's "dwelling in the land" is expressed in Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 12:11, and Psalm 95:11?

How does Dr. Pratt demonstrate that Israel's deliverance from Egypt constituted God's maintenance of the creation order? How does Dr. Pratt demonstrate that God's judgment on Egypt marked a reversion to chaos? List the parallel contrasts between the deliverance of Israel and judgment on Egypt.

Deliverance of Israel

Judgment on Egypt



Now, how would you describe Moses' general pastoral purpose towards Israel in the creation account? How did it go beyond a mere historical report to address other needs?

Part Four: Modern Application

Watch the third portion of *An Ideal World* covering the subject “Original Meaning.” After watching and taking notes on this portion of the video, you will be ready to interact with the following guidelines.

Dr. Pratt suggests that creation anticipates the salvation brought to us through Christ in three important stages relating to the advent of Christ’s Kingdom. What are those three stages, and when do they take place?



- 1) _____

- 2) _____

- 3) _____

According to the New Testament, Christ’s appearance marks a radical re-ordering of the universe against the forces of chaos. Discuss ways in which *the inauguration of Christ’s kingdom* in the incarnation is seen through the lens of creation in John 1:1-5; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Colossians 1:15-20 and Hebrews 1:1-3a.

Israel's deliverance from Egypt was nothing short of a re-creation. Paul describes our deliverance from sin in similar terms: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone. The new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). What significance can be drawn from the NIV translation of *ktisis* as "creation" rather than as "creature"?

By placing our faith in Christ through the gospel, during *the continuation of Christ's kingdom* we are reconnected with God's splendid order. In what ways does creation serve as a prototype for redemption in Paul's description of the Christian life in Ephesians 4:20-24 and Colossians 3:9-10?

Summation: From "the beginning" (Gen. 1:1) to the "renewal of all things" (*palingenesia*; Matt. 19:28), God moves against the sin, death and chaos of the world. Like the end of God's ordering of creation in Genesis 2:1-3, *the consummation of Christ's kingdom* will bring a Sabbath rest for the people of God (Heb. 4:4-11). In the "new heavens and the new earth," the primordial chaos of the sea disappears (Rev. 21:1) and God's people reign with him over his Ideal World.