

Lesson 1. Preparation for Introducing Genesis

A close reading of Genesis 1–11 is required in this lesson. These passages were adapted from creation-flood stories in Mesopotamian literature of the second and early first millennia. The creation-flood stories in Genesis are neither history nor myth. Ancient Near Eastern thinkers did not have modern day methods of exploring serious questions that we would call philosophical and theological. They added and subtracted narrative details and varied the plot as they sought meaning through the ancient stories. These narratives point to a sacred time when divine decisions were made that determined the future of the human race.

The Book of Genesis, in the Jewish Scriptures opens with the Hebrew word, Bereshit, (“in the beginning.”) Genesis is the seven-day creation account made up of two parts. The first account, Genesis 1:1–2:3, expresses the creative aspect of “Elohim,” the Hebrew generic word for God. It takes six days to create the heaven and the earth. The narrative opens with darkness and light on the first day and ends with the creation of mankind on the sixth day. God then rests and sanctifies creation on the seventh day. In the second part, Genesis 2:4–2:24, shifts the focus from cosmic grandeur to a closer more personal look at humanity’s beginnings. In this account, “Yahweh”, the Hebrew personal name for God, fashions the first man from dust and breathes life into him. God then places man in the Garden of Eden and creates the first woman as a companion.

The first chapters of Genesis describe a worldview that has shaped the way Western culture understands itself. Genesis assigns order and purpose to creation. It depicts a world in harmony where humanity and the natural world can co-exist. Both parts of the creation story in Genesis form the basis of comparison for the stories of creation presented by Ovid.