

The Bible in Context Ep 4: Gen 1:2b-10

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Hey everybody, welcome back. And before we get started today, we have a big announcement. And that is that we have had a name change. So we are no longer the Deeper Dive podcast. That name was sort of a placeholder that we just ran with for a while. But now we are the Bible in context. So if you've been listening more recently and you've been hearing us say, welcome back to Deeper Dive, and you have no idea why we were saying that, well, that's why. And so now we are the.

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Bible in Context podcast because we want to read the Bible as it was meant to be read in its cultural and literary context and also because our first name was very popular. There were lots of deeper dives. So, welcome back to the Bible in Context. Today it's just going to be me, Nate will be back with us next time and looking forward to that. But for now, let's go ahead and dive back into the first chapter of Genesis. Last time we left off

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God coming to the world, the waters and the earth in a state of ruin, and these are things that are not hostile to him, but they are bad. He did not create these bad things, but they are there and he is going to begin forming them into good. And so when we left off, we saw the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Now the Hebrew term behind spirit here is ruach, and it can be translated as spirit, breath, or wind.

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So when you breathe in and breathe out, if you feel your breath on your hand, that is your Ruach that you are feeling. It is, in a sense, your animating life force because without it you cannot live and you need your breath to move and to do work and to animate your body. So it can be helpful to think of it as an animating life force. Now Yahweh's breath and his spirit is different from ours. His is actually a living person.

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And we're going to see that while our Ruach comes into us and gives us life, Yahweh's Ruach goes out and creates life. Now, the spirit of God, the Ruach, or breath of God, was hovering as a bird over the face of the waters. This word, hovering, is actually used of birds in Deuteronomy 32, 11. Just kind of this peaceful, caring hovering.

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and you actually see, I think Luke picks this up in the New Testament whenever he depicts the Holy Spirit as a dove coming down to Jesus. Now God's Ruach is hovering over the face of the waters just like the darkness was over the face of the deep. So here we have these two dark

things mirrored, the darkness and the deep, darkness over the face of the deep. And now we have God's Ruach.

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over the face of the waters. And so it does seem like these waters, by being associated with God's Ruach instead of with the darkness, they are no longer referred to as the Tatom, as the deep, the abyss, but now they are referred to some better waters, possibly some more life-giving waters, like what will be seen in the Garden of Eden. So already Yahweh's presence has taken what is bad and

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bettered it. And now we have our entire pre-creation set up. There is the ruined land, there is the darkness and the deep, and then there is God's Ruach over the waters. Now we get to the actual days of creation. And we're going to see Yahweh start to restrain and confine these dark elements and turn them into something good. And there's also a lot of artistry that runs through this entire.

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creation segment. Nate has already pointed out in the servant series that the first three days are spaces that are created that are filled by things on days four through six. There's a lot more going on than just that if you want to go even a level deeper. There is actually a video it'll kind of make your head spin, but it's really good. There's a scholar named David Andrew Teeter. He is a Bible scholar at Harvard.

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and he recently was part of the Hebrew Bible Conference at Multnomah University and he gave a talk on the literary symmetry in Genesis 1. It is very in-depth but it's really cool so if by any chance you wanted to check that out it is called Dr. Andrew Teeter, The World Seen Hebrew Bible Conference. So check that out if you want to. Again it might make your head spin but it's really cool to see all the things that he pulls out of the text.

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And also, like Nate mentioned, there are sevens woven all throughout this text. There are certain key words that are said in multiples of seven throughout Genesis 1 and the first few chapters of Genesis. Gordon Winnem's Genesis commentary in the Word Biblical Commentary Series points out a lot of this. And I'm just giving you this by way of mention. We're not really going to dig into all these minute things. They're really cool and they do help us.

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in our understanding of the construction of specific literary units as we read and that is helpful it helps us shown how helps us see how the narrative is broken up a little bit uh... that's not really gonna be our purpose i'm not going to get that granular it's useful stuff it's really cool stuff and there's some resources i mentioned that you can look at this and but we're going to look at are more top-level

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the direction and the force of the narrative of Genesis. Whenever these minute details become relevant, and they will from time to time, then we will look at those. Not to say that they're not important other times, but sometimes they're just beyond the scope of what we are doing. I wanna go ahead and take a look at the first day, and maybe this will give you a little taste of what is in the rest of Genesis 1 so that you can go ahead and read the rest of the chapter. And maybe about next week you will be able to...

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beat me to what I'm going to say about it. So in verse 3 it says, and God said. Now the act of speech right here, I just want to point out that speaking requires opening the mouth and breathing. I think that the idea here of speaking and the breath, the ruach of God that was just mentioned, those are not unconnected ideas. We're not given here a full

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detailed doctrine of the Trinity or multiple persons of Yahweh or anything like that here. But there's hints there that even Genesis will start to build on later as we will see. So he says, Let there be light. And there was light. And God saw the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day and the darkness he called night. And there was evening and there was morning the first day.

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So what does he do here? God takes the darkness and the light and he separates them and then he names each of them, giving them a destiny. So this harkens back to what we said in our second episode about functional ontology. Throughout the ancient Near East, there are instances of taking the primordial ruined matter and separating it out and then decreeing destinies.

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giving a function within the now ordered world god makes the light separate it from the darkness assigns it the function of being day and the darkness he goes ahead and assigns he doesn't completely obliterated that doesn't come yet that that will come actually in the bill story but he assigned that the function of so he has not destroyed darkness

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but rather he has restrained it with light. And we're going to see that he continues to do that. He continues to restrain these elements of ruin that we saw in the first couple of verses of Genesis. And he begins to make this ruined space into something good. His presence, when it comes into contact with these things that are bad, these things that are ruined, he makes them good. Now, when it comes to the light, I just want to point out that.

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This isn't, again, the 21st century science idea of photons being created. We're going to see that light is actually associated with Yahweh's salvation and life. Just like darkness is associated with unrighteousness and ruin and death, light is going to be associated with Yahweh and with his life and goodness. And we'll see that as we come back to this passage.

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What I'm going to do is I'm going to step through the days of creation and the Garden of Eden narrative and highlight some important elements. And then we're going to come back and just trace a theme or two through these chapters and we'll continue to trace themes and motifs throughout Genesis. But for Genesis 1 in particular, it's helpful for us to first slowly walk through the elements of the text so that we can understand it in its ancient context before

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we try to understand the narrative themes that flow through it. But light being associated with Yahweh's salvation will actually be one of the key elements of the theme we're going to trace. So again, we will come back to that. Let's go ahead and talk about day two. So starting in verse six, and God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters," and let it separate the waters from the waters." "And God made the expanse and separated the waters "that were under the expanse "from the waters that were above the expanse." "And it was so."

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and God called the expanse heaven and there was evening and there was morning the second day so there's a few things to say about this uh... this day in creation uh... first of all i just want to point out this is where the heavens are created so again this is just another point showing that verse one of genesis is a title because it says in the beginning the heavens and the earth were created well there were no heavens until the second day this wasn't

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the first act of creating all things and then starting to work on the details throughout the chapter. Rather, it's a summary and then we don't get the actual heavens until day two.

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Now when we talked about verse one, I didn't mention this, but it would be helpful for us here to talk about the word heavens a little more. It's the word in Hebrew, shemaim, and you don't have to know all these Hebrew words. I think it's just nice to have a word to go along with the definition that I'm going to give. But the word shemaim, when we think of heavens, a lot of us, and I think this is kind of going away, I think we've been talking about how heaven is not this harps and clouds kind of

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place but it's it's God's dwelling that is meant to reunite with the earth. The word Shemayan, the word heavens is not just referring to God's realm or some ethereal place or God's throne room however you picture that rather it's simply the word skies it just means everything that is above

your head there's the and that's sometimes why you see it in the plural heavens or skies and not just heaven or the sky because you've got the air above your head

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And then in this worldview, you've got the dome above that that holds up the waters that are above that, and then above that there is God's throne room, God's dwelling place. So there's multiple layers to the sky here, and so it makes a little more sense why we see skies instead of just the sky. Now let's talk about this word, expanse, a little bit. The Hebrew word is rakia, and when it is in a verbal form in Hebrew, it refers to flattening out something.

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Sort of like making a shield, something like that, beating that out into a flat surface that can be used to protect a soldier. In Ezekiel, we actually see the word rakia used to talk about Yahweh's chariot thrown riding on top of it. So the rakia is actually likely a solid surface that is holding up the waters above and separating it from the air that is beneath it.

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John Walton in his book Genesis 1 is Ancient Cosmology. He actually takes it that another word that doesn't appear in Genesis 1, the shehakim, is the solid part of the dome and the rakia is the space under the dome. Either way, the point is here that the expanse that we're looking at has to do with creating this dome sort of shape that separates the waters below the expanse from the waters above the expanse.

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The expanse here is not outer space. The vast expanse that we think of. This is either the dome that separates the waters from one another or is the space, the expanse between the dome and the waters below. And once again here in this day, we have Yahweh controlling and restraining an element of chaos. He takes the waters and he splits them, he separates them.

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That idea of splitting the waters is actually going to be important, so we'll come back to that when we walk through some of the themes in Genesis, especially Genesis 1, but hold on to the idea of Yahweh splitting the waters. If you remember what we read in Psalm 74, that's going to sound familiar about Yahweh splitting the heads of Leviathan and crushing many waters. But for now, let's go ahead and move on to day three. So, and God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together.

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into one place and let the dry land appear. And it was so. God called the dry land earth and the waters that were gathered together he called seas. And God saw that it was good. So here again God is taking some of the ruined elements and designating them for something else. He's separating out some of the waters and now designating them to be seas, to be something that humans can use. I'm not sure exactly what the Israelites may have been thinking when they saw this word.

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seas but they may have been thinking more of commerce and fishing and just this part of the waters that they can actually get out there and use that's a little closer to the shore and not quite out into the middle of watery nowhere where death is almost sure. And you actually see the exact term of setting a limit for the sea. Let's take a look at Proverbs 8:29. It's just kind of cool to see how later biblical authors reflect.

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on this passage. So, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth. And so again, Proverbs is seeing this act of creating the seas as taking some of the waters, setting them a limit at the shore, and saying that the ruined elements can come no further. And if you understand creation in this way, it will really help you as you read some later biblical passages.

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So I want to read Job 38 for maybe down through verse 11. And viewing this as Yahweh restraining elements of ruin really changes the way you might read the last speech of Yahweh in Job. Instead of Yahweh just telling Job, hey, you should shut up because look at all this cool stuff I made, he's reiterating to Job that I'm the one who controls chaos. I'm the one that.

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Controls and restrains elements of ruin and can give life and if you read it that way That'll really change your reading of job. This is not supposed to be about job, but this is really cool So let's read this job 38 versus 4 Through 11 where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding who determined its measurements surely you know or who stretched the line upon it on What were its bases sunk or who laid its cornerstone?

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when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, or who shut in the seas with doors, when it burst out of the womb, and when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed limits for it, and set bars and doors, and said, thus far shall you come no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed." So here in the third day with the creation of the seas and with all three of these days,

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We have Yahweh taking something that is in ruin, something that is bad, and making it good, restraining it, or separating it out from what is bad and giving it a purpose and a destiny, recreating it into something good, something that he can use for his purposes of making good. Viewing the creation and the world in this way is really going to help us as we continue through the biblical story.

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We want to see Yahweh take these elements of ruin and completely remove them. We'll see finally in Genesis that Yahweh is the light of the earth, that darkness is no more and the sea is no more. So these elements of ruin in Revelation, they are completely removed, completely gone, and Yahweh has finally fully defeated them. Here he's only setting limits to them and they're still within creation. Yahweh's purposes are began but not complete.

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Understanding that will help us to get the tension behind some of the biblical stories and understand some of the vocabulary about nature that is used throughout the story And I think it's worth mentioning something that I've just hinted at There's a common conception that after Genesis 1 God's creation was quote-unquote perfect or complete or Unblemished there was nothing bad in the world well

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Based on how we're reading this text, that's not true. It was, Yahweh was taking things that were bad and creating a spot where they are good. And His intentions were to expand that spot of good so that everything becomes good. But there was still plenty of bad all around. That's what Yahweh started to create with. I don't really know that the biblical authors had the idea of perfection in their minds in the way that we do. This ultimate.

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state of everything being peak performance. They don't really seem to be concerned with that. They seem concerned with simply the concept of Yahweh's life expanding and making things good. Again, that's also going to be important for our understanding of the rest of the narratives through the Bible. So having laid that foundation in the first few days, we'll pick up with the last three days of creation where these spaces that have been created are filled with good things.

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So far we have taken the ruined elements of darkness and waters and created light in the darkness, separated the darkness, separated the waters and created a space where humans can live and then created some seas that are better for the land to dwell in and where the land can be used to set limits for the waters. And in regard to taking these verses and trying to apply...

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our own modern cosmology, our own modern sciences to them. A couple of really good books that may be helpful for those interested are C. John Collins's Reading Genesis Well and then also The Liturgy of Creation by Michael Lefebvre. So both of these books have a chapter on the ways that Genesis has been used throughout other areas of history to prove

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the science and philosophies of those days. And you really can't blame them. If you haven't been taught about other cultures than your own, then of course you're gonna read the Bible in light of your own cultures. And if you see the book as inspired, then of course it needs to make

sense to your culture. So you're going to start to read your culture into it and pull out the things that you see. In some way they resonate with your culture. But.

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us trying to take Genesis 1 and adapt it to our own science and our own cosmology, we are in a long line of generations of people who have tried to misappropriate the Genesis 1 narrative to fit our own cosmology, just so that we can seem like we make sense to those in our own culture. That's just another reminder that we need to read these texts in light of the ancient

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cultural assumptions, pull the meaning out of the narrative set in that culture, and then apply its meaning to our day, to our lives and our narratives. So until next week, continue reading through Genesis 1. Look for those elements of God taking the things that are in a state of ruin, separating them out, and then assigning them names or functions. And you'll see a little bit more of that functional ontology. That creation.

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not by zapping into existence out of nothing, but rather by taking the lump of raw material and giving it a good purpose, creating something out of raw material rather than from nothing. And then also just look for the ways in which Yahweh is restraining the ruined bad elements that we saw at the beginning of the chapter and how He is turning that into something good so that He can

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Expand his goodness through all creation by means of his images in some of what I just said I jumped ahead in the story a little bit, but we will get there Anyway, we are out of time. So thanks for listening and I hope this was helpful