



SUNDAY SCHOOL May 31, 2026

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Old Testament

Genesis 1:1-10

Context: Today's scripture opens the entire Bible. Before there are people, nations, laws, or even light itself, Genesis begins with a profound declaration: God brings order out of chaos, purpose out of emptiness, and creation into being. Genesis 1:1-10 invites us to reflect not only on how the world began, but also on what kind of God the Bible presents—a God of creativity, order, separation, balance, and life.

SIX DAYS OF CREATION AND THE SABBATH

When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

And God saw that 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.

And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters."

So, God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together 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.

OVERVIEW

Genesis 1:1-10 is the beginning of the Creation narrative and describes the first three "days" of creation. The passage moves from chaos and darkness toward structure and order:

1. God creates light and separates it from darkness.
2. God separates the waters above from the waters below, creating the sky.
3. God gathers the waters so dry land appears, preparing the earth for life.

The rhythm of the passage is important:

- God speaks
- Creation responds
- God names
- God evaluates it as "good"

This structure emphasizes intentionality, wisdom, and divine order rather than randomness or violence.



BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Immediately Before

There is no “before” in scripture because Genesis opens the Bible itself. Genesis intentionally contrasts the stories of Gods fighting, as are depicted in many Eastern Religions.

Immediately After (Genesis 1:11 onward)

The next section continues creation:

- vegetation and plants
- sun, moon, and stars
- living creatures
- humanity created in God’s image

The movement is progressive:

- Light/Dark → Sun/Moon
- Sky/Sea → Birds/Fish
- Land → Animals/Humans

Broader Narrative of Genesis

Genesis means “beginnings.” The book explores:

- beginnings of creation
- humanity
- sin
- civilization
- covenant
- Israel

Theological Themes

Genesis 1 introduces several foundational biblical themes:

- God as Creator
- Creation as good
- Order overcoming chaos
- Humanity’s responsibility toward creation
- Speech and language as creative power
- Boundaries and balance

The passage also establishes the biblical pattern that disorder and division are not the final word.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

Genesis was shaped within the cultural world of the Ancient Near East, likely reaching its final written form during or after Israel’s exile in Babylon (6th century BCE), though older oral traditions almost certainly existed long before.

Ancient creation stories from neighboring cultures often involved:



- battles between gods
- violent cosmic wars
- creation from the body parts of defeated monsters

Genesis is strikingly different.

In Genesis:

- there is one God
- creation happens peacefully through speech
- the sun and moon are not gods
- the sea is not divine or evil
- nature itself is not worshiped

This would have been politically and spiritually important for Israel during exile. Surrounded by empires claiming their gods controlled the cosmos, Genesis quietly but boldly declares: ***“Our God is above all of it.”***

There is also an anti-chaos message. Ancient people feared:

- floods
- droughts
- darkness
- disorder
- invading empires

Genesis says creation is not accidental chaos. It possesses structure and meaning.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

Most modern biblical scholars view Genesis 1 as theological literature rather than a scientific chronology. The text focuses more on:

- meaning
- purpose
- relationship

... rather than on material mechanics.

Likely Composition Timeline

- Oral traditions: possibly 1200–900 BCE or earlier
- Written/editing stages: likely during monarchy and exile periods
- Final compilation: around 500 BCE

BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

English Translation History

- Septuagint (Greek translation): ~200 BCE
- Latin Vulgate: 4th century CE



- King James Version: 1611
- Modern translations:

Verse	KJV (1611)	NIV (2011)	NRSVue (2021)
1:1	"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."	"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."	"When God began to create the heavens and the earth..."
1:2	"And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."	"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep..."	"the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep..."
1:2	"And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."	"and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."	"while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters."
1:3	"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."	"And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."	"Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."
1:4	"And God divided the light from the darkness."	"and he separated the light from the darkness."	"and God separated the light from the darkness."
1:5	"And the evening and the morning were the first day."	"And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day."	"And there was evening and there was morning, the first day."
1:6	"Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters..."	"Let there be a vault between the waters..."	"Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters..."
1:7	"God made the firmament..."	"So God made the vault..."	"So, God made the dome..."
1:8	"God called the firmament Heaven."	"God called the vault 'sky.'"	"God called the dome Sky."
1:9	"Let the dry land appear..."	same	same
1:10	"God saw that it was good."	same	same

Different translations reflect different theological assumptions about:

- literalism
- poetry
- cosmology
- science

What if Genesis was never meant to compete with science textbooks—but instead was written to tell people that chaos, fear, and darkness are not the final reality?

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY AND GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

The deeper metaphor may be this: God continually brings order from chaos.

That is true spiritually, emotionally, socially, and communally.

The "darkness over the deep" can symbolize:



- fear
- confusion
- division
- instability
- despair

And God's first act is not building people or cities. It is creating light and boundaries.

In modern life, especially in places like Grant County, we often live surrounded by chaos:

- political noise
- social media outrage
- economic anxiety
- loneliness
- distrust
- endless "hot takes"

Genesis reminds us: ***not every voice creates light***. Some voices create confusion because chaos is profitable. God separates. God clarifies. God orders. God names things truthfully.

Farmers understand this instinctively.

Fields must be ordered.

Boundaries matter.

Seasons matter.

Water must be managed.

Without structure, nothing grows.

Genesis presents creation almost like cultivation.

The passage also challenges modern Christians not to confuse "dominion" (control, domination) with exploitation. Creation is called "good" before humans ever arrive. That suggests nature possesses value beyond economic usefulness.

In a county shaped by farming, manufacturing, development debates, and questions about land use, Genesis can ***encourage stewardship rather than domination.***

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

1. Bring Light Instead of Heat

The world already has enough outrage and chaos.

Christians should be people who clarify, calm, and illuminate.

2. Respect Creation

Genesis begins with the goodness of creation.

Care for land, water, animals, and communities is not "political"; it is biblical stewardship.

3. Recognize the Power of Words

In Genesis, words create worlds.

Our speech still shapes environments:

- families



- churches
- communities
- online spaces

4. Create Order Without Becoming Controlling

There is a difference between healthy order and oppressive control.
God creates spaces where life can flourish.

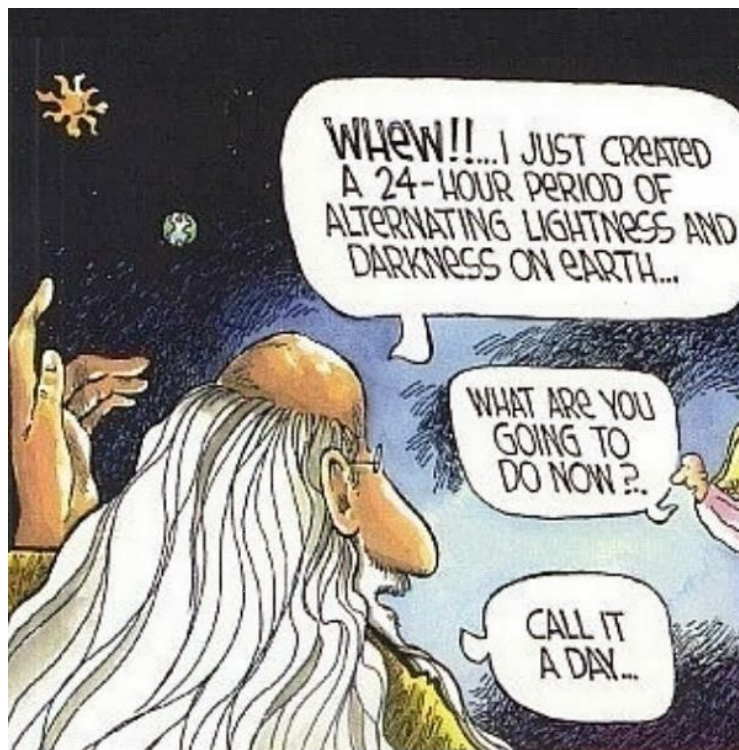
5. Remember That Chaos Is Not Final

Genesis opens with darkness and disorder.
But the story does not stay there.

That message still matters today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Why do you think Genesis begins with creation instead of immediately beginning with humanity?*
2. *What do you think the ancient Israelites needed to hear from this story during times of exile or uncertainty?*
3. *What does it mean that God calls creation “good” before humans appear?*
4. *How do words still “create worlds” today?*
5. *What kinds of chaos do we experience in modern society?*
6. *What voices today create light, and what voices create confusion?*
7. *How should Christians balance using creation while also protecting it?*
8. *Do you read Genesis 1 more literally, metaphorically, or somewhere in between? Why?*
9. *Why do you think God creates through speaking rather than through violence?*
10. *How might Genesis challenge both modern secular culture and modern religious culture?*





Gospel

Matthew 28:16-20

Context: Today's Gospel reading comes from the closing verses of the Gospel of Matthew, often called "The Great Commission." After the resurrection, the disciples meet Jesus on a mountain in Galilee, where He gives them both comfort and responsibility: to go into the world, teach, baptize, and remember that He remains with them always.

THE COMMISSIONING OF THE DISCIPLES

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

"And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

OVERVIEW

Matthew 28:16-20 serves as the grand conclusion to the Gospel of Matthew. It is both an ending and a beginning. Jesus, now resurrected, gathers His followers and commissions them to continue His work in the world. The passage combines authority, mission, discipleship, teaching, baptism, and divine presence into one final statement.

This scripture is not simply about "converting people." It is about forming communities shaped by the teachings and example of Christ. Jesus does not merely say "make believers"; He says "make disciples," implying growth, learning, practice, humility, and transformation.

The passage also carries tension. Matthew notes that "some doubted" even while worshipping Jesus. That small line reminds readers that faith and uncertainty often coexist. The disciples were not perfect spiritual heroes; they were ordinary people still trying to understand extraordinary events.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Immediate Context Before the Passage

Immediately before this passage, Matthew describes the resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 28:1-15). Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" discover the empty tomb. An angel announces that Jesus has risen, and the women are instructed to tell the disciples to meet Him in Galilee.

Matthew also includes the story of the guards being bribed to spread a false narrative that the disciples stole Jesus' body. This detail is important because Matthew is already addressing competing stories and skepticism within the early Christian world.

So, when the disciples finally meet Jesus in verses 16-20, the scene comes after fear, confusion, rumor, political pressure, and uncertainty.



Immediate Context After the Passage

Matthew ends here. There is no ascension scene like in Luke or Acts. Instead, Matthew closes with Jesus' promise: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The Gospel ends not with Jesus leaving, but with His continuing presence.

Broader Narrative of Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew consistently presents Jesus as:

- A teacher like Moses
- The fulfillment of Jewish prophecy
- A challenge to religious hypocrisy
- A bringer of the "Kingdom of Heaven"

Mountains are important throughout Matthew:

- Sermon on the Mount
- Mount of Transfiguration
- Temptation on a high mountain
- Final commissioning on a mountain

In biblical literature, mountains often symbolize revelation, closeness to God, and perspective.

Matthew also emphasizes discipleship more heavily than some other Gospels. Jesus repeatedly teaches that following Him is not merely intellectual belief but active living:

- loving enemies
- caring for the poor
- forgiving others
- rejecting performative religion
- seeking justice and mercy

The Great Commission is therefore not detached from the rest of Matthew. The disciples are being sent to teach everything Jesus already modeled throughout the book.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

This passage emerged in a world controlled by the Roman Empire. Rome valued power, hierarchy, military force, and loyalty to Caesar. Against that backdrop, early Christianity spread a radically different message centered on humility, service, forgiveness, and care for the marginalized.

The command to "go and make disciples of all nations" was socially and politically significant. Ancient societies were highly tribal and ethnically divided. Jews, Greeks, Romans, Samaritans, and Gentiles often remained socially separated.

Matthew's ending pushes beyond those boundaries. The Gospel that began focused heavily on Jewish fulfillment now expands outward universally.

There is also political risk hidden in this passage. Jesus says: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."



In the Roman world, “authority” belonged to emperors and political rulers. Saying ultimate authority belonged to Christ carried implications that challenged earthly power structures.

The early Christians were not primarily trying to overthrow Rome militarily. But they were creating alternative communities where identity was rooted less in empire, ethnicity, or class and more in shared humanity under God.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

Approximate Timeline

- c. 4 BCE – Birth of Jesus
- c. 27-30 CE – Ministry of Jesus
- c. 30 CE – Crucifixion and resurrection
- c. 50-70 CE – Early Christian communities spread through the Roman world
- c. 80-90 CE – Gospel of Matthew likely written

Matthew was probably written after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. That event deeply affected Jewish identity and early Christianity.

Many scholars believe Matthew’s audience consisted largely of Jewish Christians wrestling with:

- how to preserve faith after catastrophe
- how Christianity related to Judaism
- whether the Gospel was only for Jews or for all people

This helps explain why Matthew ends with a global mission.

BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

Original Language and Dating

Matthew was written in Greek, the common language of the eastern Roman Empire.

Key translation layers include:

- Greek manuscripts (1st century)
- Latin Vulgate (4th century)
- Early English translations like Wycliffe and Tyndale
- King James Version (1611)
- Modern translations such as NRSV, NIV, and Common English Bible

Important Translation Insights

“Make disciples”

The Greek word means more than “convert.” It implies apprenticing, mentoring, learning, and shaping a way of life. That changes the tone dramatically. Christianity becomes less about winning arguments and more about forming character.

“Nations”

The Greek word can mean nations, peoples, or ethnic groups. This suggests crossing cultural boundaries rather than building isolated religious tribes.

“Authority”



The Greek word refers not merely to raw power but legitimate authority or moral authority. Jesus' authority contrasts with domination-based systems.

"I am with you always"

The Greek phrase literally carries the sense: "I am with you all the days." This is deeply relational and ongoing, not distant or abstract.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY AND GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Metaphorically, this passage can be understood as humanity being called into mature responsibility.

The disciples begin frightened, uncertain, and imperfect. Yet Jesus still sends them. The message is not: "Become flawless, then serve."

The message is: "Even with your doubts, go live differently."

The mountain can symbolize gaining higher perspective — rising above tribalism, fear, outrage, and self-interest.

Modern society often turns "making disciples" into marketing, political influence, culture wars, or numerical growth. But Matthew's Gospel repeatedly points toward transformation of character instead:

- *humility over arrogance*
- *mercy over vengeance*
- *reconciliation over division*
- *service over dominance*

In Grant County and many rural communities, people often feel cultural anxiety:

- fear of change
- distrust of outsiders
- political polarization
- shrinking local institutions
- loss of community identity

This scripture challenges Christians to ask:

- *Are we building disciples or merely recruiting teammates?*
- *Are we teaching the teachings of Jesus or simply defending our tribe?*
- *Are we spreading peace or spreading outrage?*

The line "some doubted" may be especially important today. Many people quietly wrestle with uncertainty but feel they cannot admit it in church settings. Matthew includes doubt inside the circle of discipleship, not outside it.

That may be one of the most comforting and honest lines in the entire resurrection story.



HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

This scripture encourages Christians to:

- live their faith visibly through compassion and integrity
- teach by example more than argument
- remain humble even while holding convictions
- cross social and cultural boundaries
- avoid fear-based religion
- remember that doubt does not automatically destroy faith

The Great Commission should not become permission for arrogance or coercion.

Jesus never says: “Force people.”

He teaches, invites, models, and sends.

Perhaps the modern challenge is less about “winning the culture war” and more about whether Christians actually resemble the teachings they claim to follow.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Why do you think Matthew included the line “some doubted” even at this important moment?*
2. *What is the difference between making “converts” and making “disciples”?*
3. *What does it mean to teach Christianity through actions instead of arguments?*
4. *How can Christians cross boundaries today without losing their identity?*
5. *What does Jesus’ promise “I am with you always” mean in practical daily life?*
6. *How can churches unintentionally turn discipleship into tribalism or politics?*
7. *If Jesus gave this commission today in Grant County, what might He specifically challenge us to do differently?*



Addendum

Fear, Faith, and the Unknown

During our discussion last week about the disciples hiding behind locked doors, our conversation naturally moved toward fear — not only fear of danger, but fear of uncertainty, suffering, and death itself.

One important realization from the discussion was that fear does not always look the same. One person may fear illness. Another may fear loneliness, failure, rejection, loss of control, or death. The outward fears differ, but often they grow from the same deeper place: *uncertainty about what lies ahead and whether we are truly safe, loved, or held by something greater than ourselves.*

The disciples understood that kind of fear. After the crucifixion, they locked the doors because they were afraid. Even after hearing reports of resurrection, they still struggled to believe fully. The Gospel writers do not hide their fear or uncertainty. In many ways, that honesty is what makes the story feel real.

Do we fear death because we don't personally know anyone who has returned? We immediately think of Jesus' resurrection, yet even then, the resurrection does not function as laboratory proof. It functions as a testimony that invites faith. Christian faith has never been built entirely upon certainty. It has always involved trust. The writer of Hebrews describes faith as "*the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*" (Hebrews 11:1). ***Faith is not the absence of questions. Faith is learning to move forward despite them.***

We talked about how fear may come from personal experiences. At first, there is fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. But through prayer, a calm may eventually come over us, and we may reach a place where we no longer fear death in the same way. That does not mean we want suffering or wish for death. Rather, we begin to experience a deep trust that life rests in God's hands.

Perhaps that is part of what Jesus was trying to give the disciples when He appeared behind the locked doors and said, "*Peace be with you.*" He did not promise they would never suffer. He did not remove every mystery about life or death. ***Instead, He offered peace in the middle of uncertainty.***

Modern culture often tells us that we should only believe what can be proven. Yet much of life does not work that way. Love cannot be mathematically proven, yet we experience it. Trust cannot be physically measured, yet relationships depend upon it. Hope itself always involves stepping into an unknown future.

Fear asks: "What if everything falls apart?"

Faith asks: "What if, even then, God is still present?"

That does not eliminate fear overnight. Even faithful people experience anxiety, grief, and doubt. The Christian journey is not about pretending fear does not exist. It is about learning not to let fear become our master.

Or, as I mentioned last week ... Woody Allen once joked: "I'm not afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens."

Sometimes humor says honestly what many people quietly feel.

And perhaps that honesty itself can become the beginning of faith.



The “Younger Generation”

One of the more interesting conversations that came out of last week’s Sunday School was a comment that “you can’t trust the younger generation.” In some ways, it sounded familiar ... why? Because every generation seems to say it eventually.

The ancient Greeks complained about disrespectful youth. In the 1960s, younger Americans said, “Never trust anyone over 30.” Today, social media is filled with older people criticizing younger generations while younger generations criticize older ones. The cycle never seems to end.

But history suggests something important: every generation has been both right and wrong about something. Therefore, like so many things, we need to listen ... AND discern. If it doesn’t sound right, don’t discount it right away, AND (just as importantly), if it does sound right, make sure you understand it before you become a follower of it.

The younger generation of the 1960s helped push America to confront difficult truths about the Vietnam War, civil rights, environmental concerns, and blind trust in institutions. Many young voices saw problems that older generations either missed or accepted as normal. At the same time, parts of that same generation also embraced destructive excesses, like the drug culture, reckless behavior, and the idea that freedom meant having no boundaries at all.

Meanwhile, the older generation carried strengths of its own: sacrifice, stability, discipline, and a sense of responsibility shaped by war and hardship. But some older Americans also defended segregation, dismissed protesters without listening, and confused patriotism with unquestioning obedience.

One haunting example came after the Kent State shootings in 1970, when some older Americans openly said the students “deserved it.” Looking back now, many people recognize that the younger generation was raising legitimate moral concerns about the war, even if not every protest or action was wise. That seems to be the real lesson of history: younger generations often see problems clearly because they have not yet accepted them as normal. Older generations often see consequences clearly because they have lived through cycles before.

The danger comes when either side moves into *absolutes*:

- “Young people are ruining everything.”
- “Older people are the problem.”
- “We were always right.”
- “They are always wrong.”

Scripture itself pushes against that kind of thinking. The Bible repeatedly shows God working through young people (remember David, Jeremiah, Mary, Timothy?), while also valuing the wisdom and memory of elders. It’s not about domination ... it’s about being humble. One thing that is hard for anyone to grasp is “I might be wrong.”

Maybe every generation carries both wisdom and blind spots. Younger people should be heard, not because they are automatically correct, but because they may see truths others have ignored. Older people should be respected, not because they are automatically right, but because experience can reveal dangers that enthusiasm sometimes misses. In the end, wisdom probably comes when generations stop seeing each other as enemies and start seeing each other as necessary conversation partners. And perhaps that is one of the great challenges of both democracy and faith: learning how to listen without surrendering discernment.