

Breath Comes First  
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Genesis 1:1-2:4 Common English Bible (CEB)

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— 3 God said, “Let there be light.” And so light appeared. 4 God saw how good the light was. God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God named the light Day and the darkness Night.

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

6 God said, “Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters to separate the waters from each other.” 7 God made the dome and separated the waters under the dome from the waters above the dome. And it happened in that way. 8 God named the dome Sky.

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

9 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. 10 God named the dry land Earth, and he named the gathered waters Seas. God saw how good it was. 11 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. 12 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.

13 There was evening and there was morning: the third day.

14 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. 15 They will be lights in the dome of the sky to shine on the earth.” And that’s what happened. 16 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. 17 God put them in the dome of the sky to shine on the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw how good it was.

19 There was evening and there was morning: the fourth day.

20 God said, “Let the waters swarm with living things, and let birds fly above the earth up in the dome of the sky.” 21 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. 22 Then God blessed them: “Be fertile and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.”

23 There was evening and there was morning: the fifth day.

24 God said, “Let the earth produce every kind of living thing: livestock, crawling things, and wildlife.” And that’s what happened. 25 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. 26 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.”

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

28 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.” 29 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. 30 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. 31 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. 2 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. 3 God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all the work of creation. 4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

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From our reading today, what is the first thing that happens?

I don’t mean this to be a trick question like which came first, the chicken or the egg? I’m honestly asking you, “what is the first thing that happens when God CREATES?”

This portion of the Bible is one of the most well-known portions of all the Bible. It’s “the beginning” of the book, which is where everyone starts when they approach the Bible for the first time or when they return, determined to “*really* read it this time.”

- What is the first thing to happen?
- Well...this is the creation story...there are seven days in the creation story...so what did God do on the first day?
  - “Let there be light!” Verse 3, “Then God said, “Let there be light.”
  - That’s the first thing that God did – make light!

....not exactly....

When God created the heavens and the earth the FIRST thing that happened was in verse 2, “...a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.”

Let’s review verses 1 and 2....

1: when God began to create everything – the heavens and the earth

2: the earth lacked shape and was totally empty

It was dark over the deep seas

and GOD’S WIND – GOD’S SPIRIT – GOD’S BREATHE swept over the waters, hovered over the surface

3: THEN, God spoke...

4: ...and it was GOOD

I'm sure many of you know that there are two creation stories in the Bible. We just read the first one. Immediately following this creation story is the second story, 2:4b-25. In THAT creation story it tells us...

1: when God began to create everything - the heavens and the earth

2: before there was anything – plants, vegetation, rain

3: God took dirt, soil from the ground and sculpted it into a human – and GOD BREATHED the breath of life into the human.

4: ...and it was GOOD

CREATION – all that is GOOD *from God, through God and of God* -begins with RUACH; RUACH is the Hebrew word used in scripture that means wind, spirit, breath.

Creation BREATHES

The SPIRIT of God is in all of creation

The SPIRIT of life blows wildly, gently and everywhere.

The SPIRIT of our soul *hovers* over us, over all of creation, as in verse two, ready and waiting to bring order out of chaos.

After God's RUACH hovered, GOD spoke, and LIFE began...

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"God did not act alone but shared the divine power to create with creation itself. Creation isn't a "one and done" process.... It continues, all of the time. That's why God commanded, "let the waters bring forth swarms of LIVING creatures" and "let the earth bring forth LIVING creatures of every kind." <sup>1</sup>

The human was made in God's Image; a reflection of God's beauty and goodness, in order to continue creating that beauty and goodness. We breathe. We speak. We create...and it is good (or at least we hope that it is).

"All people, whatever their race or gender or class, are created in God's image, which means that each person is to be respected and valued and honored...(H)umanity is to care for creation in ways that help the earth and living beings become the best they can be."

Just like God hovering over the waters, in complete darkness, facing emptiness and chaos, we create biologically, spiritually and poetically.

Jewish and Christian histories for a very long time suggested that Genesis was written by Moses, which would have been around the 14<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century BC. With more modern scholarship however, "there is a strong, general consensus today among biblical scholars that ... [suggests that] the Pentateuch as we know it is the end product of a complex literary process ... that did not come to a close until the exile (586-539 BC) and postexilic period."<sup>2</sup> Regardless of which theory one supports, they both lead to a belief that Genesis was written in response to the crisis of exile.

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<sup>1</sup> Connections, Year A, Volume 3. Pg. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Enns, *When was Genesis written and why does it matter?* [https://wp.biologos.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/enns\\_scholarly\\_essay3.pdf](https://wp.biologos.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/enns_scholarly_essay3.pdf)

Having faced slavery, pain and darkness, Genesis and the creation story with its beautiful poetic goodness, was created, written by Moses (or other writers) who faced darkness and chaos and out of it sought to breathe life into hopeless and create goodness.

The book of Genesis is so often looked at as pure scientific history with processes and timelines for a precise creation of the universe, while the beautiful poetry of creation is overlooked.

As author and theologian Daniel Clendenin writes, “The creation poetry [in Genesis] doesn't enlighten us about history, cosmology, or science as we understand those disciplines today. They never intended to do that, and even if that was their intent, their science and history would have been outmoded shortly after the author wrote. Just like our own science of fifty years ago seems outmoded today — and how rudimentary today's science will look in 3,000 years (about the age of the Genesis poetry).<sup>3</sup>

Creation begins in darkness, disorder and chaos and the writers of Genesis, record a story of God whose breath enters into it all, providing life, order and relationship.

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The creation stories in Genesis, whether historical and scientifically factual or more faithfully poetic or both, the creation story speaks of breath creating life in darkness and chaos. That is the light. That is good. That is God. That is humanity.

Anne Frank's diary was written by a teenage girl, barely on the brink of adulthood, trapped in an attic. Terrorized day and night by bombs and news of massacre, she lived hand-in-hand with the knowledge that her annex was her only hope. Her only sanctuary. Outside, death was certain. Still, somehow, she found the wisdom to write:

“The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere they can be quiet, alone with heavens, nature, and God.”

Still, she found a path toward happiness.

Zora Neale Hurston was the daughter of slaves. Her parents were considered possessions to be bought or sold until the day of their supposed emancipation. Their "freedom," however, was tenuous. Dangerous. Their life in the American South during Reconstruction was barely better than slavery. Still, Hurston found the love in her heart to write:

“When God had made The Man, he made him out of stuff that sung all the time and glittered all over. Some angels got jealous and chopped him into millions of pieces, but still he glittered and hummed. So they beat him down to nothing but sparks but each little spark had a shine and a song. So they covered each one over with mud. And the lonesomeness in the sparks made them hunt for one another.

Still, she found a way toward connection.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Clendenin. *The Poetry of Creation*. <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20080512JJ.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> Leah Rhyne, *Finding Beauty in the Darkness*. 12/21/16. <https://litreactor.com/columns/finding-beauty-in-the-darkness>

The breath of God in our souls, bursts forth life and creates goodness when there is darkness and chaos.

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For many, face coverings are shielding our breathe and protecting our lives.

At the same time weighted knees are pressing down and choking other's breath out of them and extinguishing their lives.

We are experiencing ad witnessing darkness and chaos in America.

The breath of God exists in all of creation. In the image of God, as creators sharing in creation, we use that breath, our soul, to speak into the darkness and over the chaos, "let there be justice...let there be peace...and let it be good."

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It all begins with RUACH – wind, spirit, breath.

Where do you sense the Spirit of God hovering over us, speaking to us to bring order out of our current chaos?

Every day is a new beginning, a new opportunity to breathe and create life and goodness.

How will you do that today?

AMEN