

GENESIS 1:26

TO WHOM WAS GOD SPEAKING?

STUDY GUIDE

A Companion to the Reader Edition

Lessons, Questions, and Deeper Analysis

PURPOSE

This guide teaches the argument as if the reader is meeting it for the first time. The simple explanation always comes first. Technical grammar and metaphysics come second, after the basic idea is clear.

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How to Use This Guide

The Reader Edition already puts English first. This guide goes one step further. It slows the argument down, explains each idea before using it, and separates the basic lesson from the deeper material.

THE RULE FOR THIS GUIDE

Understand the idea first. Learn the technical word second. You should never have to know Hebrew or philosophy before you can understand the argument.

The Four-Step Learning Pattern

1. Start simple. Each lesson begins in ordinary language.
2. Look at the text. We ask what Genesis actually says before arguing about what it means.
3. Go deeper. After the basic point is clear, the guide adds the grammar, logic, history, or metaphysics.
4. Say it yourself. If you cannot explain the point in your own words, go back one step before moving on.

Reader Edition Map

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DO NOT MEMORIZE EVERYTHING

The goal is not to memorize every term. The goal is to see how the argument moves. Terms are tools. The text and the reasoning are the main thing.

Unit 1. Two Voices on the Page: God Speaks, Then the Narrator Reports

1.1 Start Here

Genesis 1 contains two kinds of sentences. Sometimes God speaks. Other times the narrator tells us what happened after God spoke. Those are not the same thing.

For example, God says, “Let there be light.” Then the narrator says that there was light. The first sentence is God’s command. The second sentence is the story telling us the result.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

A narrator is the voice telling the story. Narrator commentary is not another speech by God and does not automatically introduce a new listener.

1.2 Why This Becomes Important on Day Six

On Day Six, God says in verse 24, “Let the earth bring forth.” Verse 25 then tells us that God made the animals. Verse 25 is a report of what happened. It is not God starting a new conversation.

Then God speaks again in verse 26: “Let us make man.” The study question is therefore not, “What new speaker appeared in verse 25?” No new speaker appeared. The question is, “What part of the previous work is still in place when God speaks again?”

WHY IT MATTERS

If verse 25 is treated like a new scene with a new audience, a reader may imagine a break that the text itself never announces. The continuation reading keeps God’s speech and the narrator’s report separate.

1.3 Deeper Study: Discourse

A discourse is simply a connected stretch of speech or writing. Discourse analysis asks how sentences relate to the sentences around them. Here, the important question is whether the narrator’s report in verse 25 changes the participants already established in the Day-Six work. The Reader Edition argues that it does not.

QUESTION: Why can verse 25 not by itself introduce a new hearer for verse 26?

Answer: Because verse 25 is narrator commentary. It reports the result of the previous command but does not say that a new listener, council, or divine person has entered the scene.

QUESTION: What should you keep separate when reading Genesis 1?

Answer: What God says and what the narrator reports.

Unit 2. Watch What God Places Inside the Action

2.1 Some Commands Name No Created Producer

Sometimes God commands a result without telling any created thing to produce it. “Let there be light” is the easiest example. The sentence does not say that the earth, waters, or another creature produces the light.

2.2 Other Commands Put Creation to Work

At other points, God places part of creation inside the action. The earth brings forth vegetation. The waters swarm with living creatures. The earth brings forth land animals.

SIMPLE PICTURE

Sometimes God says, in effect, “Let this exist.” Other times God says, in effect, “Let this created part of the world bring something forth.”

2.3 The Pattern at a Glance

Text	What the wording places in the action
Genesis 1:3	No created producer named
Genesis 1:11	The earth is productive
Genesis 1:20	The waters are productive
Genesis 1:24	The earth is productive
Genesis 1:26	The speaker enters a plural making; the other member is not named by the verb itself

2.4 Participation Is Not the Same as Creatorship

This is one of the most important distinctions in the whole paper. A created thing can really participate in a result without becoming another Creator.

Genesis 1:20-21 gives a clear example. The waters swarm with living creatures, yet the narrator says God created the sea creatures. The waters really participate. God still remains Creator.

REMEMBER THIS SENTENCE

Real participation does not equal equal causation. A created medium can have a real role while God remains the Creator.

QUESTION: If the waters swarm, does that make the waters another Creator?

Answer: No. The text can describe a created medium as productive while still attributing creation to God.

Unit 3. Day Three Teaches Us How Genesis Marks a Change

3.1 The Basic Observation

Day Three gives the paper an important comparison. First the waters are mentioned. Later the earth becomes the productive subject. When the part of creation involved in the commanded result changes, Genesis names the new one.

That matters because Day Six does not name a replacement for the earth between verses 24 and 26.

3.2 A Very Small Grammar Lesson: Subject

The subject of a sentence is the person or thing doing the action. In the sentence “The earth brings forth plants,” the earth is the subject. In “The waters swarm,” the waters are the subject.

GRAMMAR TERM

Subject means the person or thing that the verb is about as the doer or grammatical subject of the action.

3.3 Genesis 1:11 in Plain English

The Hebrew verb in Genesis 1:11 can look like more than one grammatical form if you stare at the verb by itself. But we do not read a verb by itself. The sentence explicitly names “the earth” as its subject. Since “earth” is feminine singular in Hebrew, the sentence means, “Let the earth bring forth.”

IMPORTANT CLARIFICATION

Sometimes two Hebrew forms can look exactly the same. When that happens, the rest of the sentence tells us which reading fits. Here the sentence names the earth as the subject, so the clause is third-person: “Let the earth bring forth,” not “You, earth, bring forth.”

3.4 Deeper Study: Form and Syntax

Morphology is the shape of a word. Syntax is how words work together in a sentence. When one word-form can be parsed more than one way, syntax can settle the question. That is what happens here: the explicit subject controls the reading.

TECHNICAL TERM AFTER THE IDEA

When different grammatical possibilities share the same written form, scholars may call the forms homographic. You do not need the word “homography” to understand the argument. The key point is that the sentence, not the isolated verb, decides the parse here.

3.5 Why Day Three Matters for Day Six

Day Three shows a simple pattern: when the part of creation involved in the commanded result changes, Genesis can name the new one. The continuation reading later asks whether Day Six gives us any comparable signal that the earth has been replaced before verse 26. The Reader Edition says no.

QUESTION: What is the paper using Day Three to show?

Answer: That Genesis can explicitly name the newly involved part of creation when the role changes. This becomes a comparison point for Day Six.

Unit 4. Day Six: One Day, Two Creature-Making Stages

4.1 Read the Sequence Slowly

Verse 24: God tells the earth to bring forth land animals.

Verse 25: the narrator reports the result.

Verse 26: God speaks again and says, "Let us make man."

DO NOT COLLAPSE THE VERSES

The argument does not say verses 24 and 26 are one sentence. They are separate speeches. The claim is that the Day-Six work continues across the narrator's report.

4.2 Completed Stage Versus Completed Work

The animal-making stage can be finished without the entire Day-Six work being finished. Humanity is made next, on the same day, under the same Creator, with no new material source announced.

Think of someone making two clay objects at the same workbench. Finishing the first object does not mean the clay supply, room, or worker vanished before the second object began.

THE ANALOGY HAS A LIMIT

The potter picture explains continuity of work and material. It does not prove who belongs to the "we." Genesis itself still has to identify the participant.

4.3 The Four Day-Six Facts

1. There are two creature-making stages on Day Six.
2. The earth is already the named productive source in the first stage.
3. The wording changes from "Let the earth bring forth" to "Let us make."
4. Humanity is now described by image, likeness, and dominion.

The third fact is what needs explanation. We cannot simply say, "The plural is there because the plural is there." We need to ask what the surrounding scene has already established before the plural appears.

4.4 The Continuity Principle

CONTINUITY PRINCIPLE

Once Genesis has placed a participant inside the work, that participant remains the locally established participant unless the text marks a change. This does not by itself prove that the participant belongs to the later “we,” but it gives the reader a reason to ask why some different participant should replace it.

QUESTION: Does the continuity principle prove the earth is in “us” all by itself?

Answer: No. It establishes the earth as the locally active participant. The rest of the case asks whether the plural should be read in light of that continuing role.

Unit 5. What “Let Us Make” Proves, and What It Does Not Prove

5.1 First-Person Plural in Everyday English

If I say, “We will move the table,” I have included myself in a group. “We” tells you that the speaker is part of the action. But the word “we” does not automatically tell you who the other people are. You need context.

The same basic point matters in Genesis 1:26. The Hebrew form translated “Let us make” is first-person plural. The speaker is included. But the form does not name the other member or members.

5.2 What “First Person” and “Plural” Mean

Term	Plain meaning
First person	The speaker includes himself: I or we
Plural	More than one is included in the grammatical subject
First-person plural	The speaker plus at least one other participant: we

5.3 One Hebrew Verb Carries the “We”

English uses two visible words, “us” and “make,” in the translation “Let us make.” Hebrew expresses the first-person plural inside the verb itself. Genesis 1:26 does not stop and introduce a separate free-standing pronoun meaning “we.”

The endings translated “our image” and “our likeness” continue the plural frame. That confirms that the wording is genuinely plural. But it still does not name the group.

HEBREW SNAPSHOT

נַעֲשֶׂה (na‘āšeh) — “let us make”: one first-person plural verb. Hebrew does not add a separate free-standing “we.”

יִבְרָא הָאֲרֶצַּת (tadšē’ hā’āreṣ) — “let the earth bring forth” (Genesis 1:11): the written verb-form can be read more than one way in isolation, but the sentence explicitly names “the earth” as its subject, so the clause is third-person.

תִּבְרָא הָאֲרֶצַּת (tôṣē’ hā’āreṣ) — “let the earth bring forth” (Genesis 1:24): the verb is third-person feminine singular because hā’āreṣ (“the earth”) is the explicit feminine-singular subject.

WHAT GRAMMAR GIVES YOU

Grammar gives a real plural subject that includes the speaker.

WHAT GRAMMAR DOES NOT GIVE YOU

Grammar alone does not tell you whether the other member is the earth, angels, another divine person, or some other participant. That question has to be answered from context.

5.4 Deeper Study: Volitional Force

“Let us make” expresses a proposal, resolve, or volitional action. Volitional simply means language connected with willing or deciding to act. The Reader Edition keeps the technical point modest: the form is first-person plural, and the sentence and context give it the “let us” force.

5.5 Why Examples from Other Passages Matter

Other first-person plural passages show that the form itself does not identify the group. The surrounding story does. At Babel, the builders are already known. When Laban says, “Let us make a covenant,” the text identifies the participants. In 2 Kings 6:2, Elisha is being spoken to but is not automatically part of the “we.”

KEY LESSON

Being addressed does not automatically make someone part of “we,” and being part of “we” is not determined by the verb form alone. The scene has to identify the group.

QUESTION: What is the strongest safe grammatical claim?

Answer: “Let us make” is genuinely first-person plural and includes the speaker, but grammar alone does not identify the other participant.

Unit 6. Verse 27: Plural Making, Singular Creating

6.1 What Happens Immediately After “Let Us Make”?

Verse 27 does not say, “And they created man.” It returns to God as the singular subject of the creation report. The Reader Edition emphasizes the creation statement three times: God created humanity in his image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.

That does not erase the plural of verse 26. It tells us not to turn the plural making into several Creators.

CORE DISTINCTION

Verse 26 can contain plural participation in the making while verse 27 reserves creatorship to God.

6.2 “Make” and “Create” Are Not Magic Opposites

The argument does not depend on claiming that the Hebrew words for “make” and “create” can never overlap in meaning. That would be too strong. The argument is about how Genesis distributes the roles in this scene.

Verse 26 speaks about making in the plural. Verse 27 reports creation with God as the singular subject. The text itself gives us the distinction we need without turning the two verbs into absolute dictionary opposites.

6.3 The Simple Rule

SAY IT THIS WAY

Created material can participate in what is made. God alone remains the Creator.

QUESTION: Why is verse 27 important for the continuation reading?

Answer: Because it prevents the reading from turning the earth into another Creator. The plural making is followed by singular divine creation.

Unit 7. Genesis 2:7: Humanity Really Is From the Ground

7.1 The Material Question

Genesis 1:26 does not explain every detail of how the human body is formed. Genesis 2:7 does. It says that God forms the man from dust from the ground and then gives life.

That matters because the continuation reading is not simply arguing from silence in verse 25. Genesis later gives positive information about humanity’s material source: the human body is from the ground.

7.2 Human and Ground

The Hebrew words for “human/man” and “ground” sound closely related. The Reader Edition uses that word-link as part of the larger material picture. The point is not that the word “man” literally means “image of earth.” It does not.

WHAT THE PAPER ACTUALLY CLAIMS

The body is materially from the ground. The earth is not the source of God’s image. Those are different claims.

7.3 Genesis 3:19 Closes the Circle

“Dust you are, and to dust you shall return” reinforces the same material relation. The human body comes from earth-derived material and returns to it.

7.4 Deeper Study: Material Grounding

When the guide says the body is “grounded” in the earth, it means the earth explains the body’s material constitution. Grounding here is a way of asking, “What explains why this part of the human is the way it is?”

PLAIN ENGLISH BEFORE PHILOSOPHY

The body comes from the ground. The God-related image, calling, and dominion come from God. One human being can have both truths at the same time.

QUESTION: Does Genesis 2:7 by itself prove who belongs to “us” in Genesis 1:26?

Answer: No. It supports the material continuity of the earth. The identity of the plural still has to be argued from the whole Day-Six sequence.

Unit 8. One Human Being, Different Kinds of Contribution

8.1 Why “Our Image” Does Not Require Equal Sources

A major objection is easy to see: if the earth is included in the plural, does that mean the earth has God’s image and gives part of that divine image to humanity? The Reader Edition answers no.

The phrase describes one human result. Different parts or features of that one human can come from different sources without those sources becoming equal.

8.2 Whole and Part

A human being is one whole. The body is a real part of that human. The human also has real relationships, roles, and properties. Saying those features have different sources does not split the human into two humans.

EASY EXAMPLE

A house can have bricks from one place, a design from an architect, work from builders, and a purpose chosen by the owner. The house is still one house. Different contributions do not automatically create different houses.

Mapping for this argument: the earth corresponds only to the bricks or material. God corresponds to the architect, builder, and owner - the source of design, action, and purpose.

8.3 Image and Likeness

The Reader Edition does not divide “image” and “likeness” into two separate packages, one from earth and one from God. It treats the phrase as describing the one human reality. God is the

defining source of the God-related image, likeness, representative role, calling, and dominion. The earth supplies the bodily material.

8.4 Why Verse 27 Can Still Say “His Image”

Verse 27 names the completed human according to the defining relation to God. That does not cancel the fact that the body is made from earth-derived material. “His image” answers the God-related identity question. Genesis 2:7 answers the material question.

DO NOT CONFUSE THE QUESTIONS

“Whose image does humanity bear?” and “What is the human body made from?” are different questions. The answer to one does not erase the answer to the other.

8.5 Paul and “the Image of the Earthy”

First Corinthians 15 later uses image-language for the inherited earthly side of humanity. The Reader Edition carefully limits the point: Paul does not independently identify the earth as the other member of Genesis 1:26. Paul simply shows that Scripture can use image-language for humanity’s Adamic, earth-derived side.

QUESTION: What is the safest way to explain “our image” on this reading?

Answer: It describes one human whole with unequal relations to its sources. The earth supplies bodily material; God supplies the defining God-related image, likeness, calling, and dominion.

Unit 9. Causation Without the Philosophy Fog

9.1 Why Use Causal Language at All?

The paper uses causal terms for one reason: to stop different roles from being mixed together. The terms sound difficult, but the questions are ordinary.

USE A CHAIR FIRST

Who made the chair? What is it made from? What tools were used? What gives it the shape of a chair? What is it for? Those are different questions about one object.

9.2 The Five Questions

Causal term	Plain-language explanation
Efficient cause	Who brings it about? Who is the maker?
Material cause	What is it made from?
Instrumental cause	What created means or tool is used?
Formal cause	What gives it its defining form or character?
Final cause	What is it for? What is its purpose?

9.3 Apply the Questions to Genesis

Question	Reader Edition answer
Who creates and orders the whole?	God
What is the body made from?	Earth or ground
What created means is already under God's command?	The earth as a productive medium
Where does the defining God-related image and representative identity come from?	God
What purpose is named for humanity?	Dominion and calling under God

9.4 One Important Historical Note

The four classic Aristotelian causes are efficient, material, formal, and final. “Instrumental cause” is a later way of speaking about a tool or subordinate means under the efficient cause. The Reader Edition uses it because it helps explain how the earth can function as a created means without becoming the primary maker.

THE POINT OF THE WHOLE LESSON

Different causal roles can be real without being equal. God can be the Creator while the earth is truly the material source of the body and a created means in the work.

QUESTION: Why is “the earth participated” not the same as “the earth created”?

Answer: Because participation can describe a material or instrumental role. Creatorship names the primary efficient source of the act, which the paper reserves to God.

Unit 10. Why Does the Plural Appear Here and Only Here?

10.1 The Explanatory Problem

A good interpretation should not only tell us what “we” means. It should also explain why Genesis changes its wording at this particular point.

The Reader Edition calls attention to a simple logical rule: something that stays the same throughout the chapter cannot, by itself, explain a wording change that happens only once.

10.2 Constant Versus Variable

What stays constant?	What changes locally on Day Six?
God is the source of creation.	The same earth continues into a second creature-making stage.
On classical Trinitarianism, Father, Son, and Spirit act together in every outward work.	Humanity is now specified by image, likeness, and dominion.
The same divine identity and power are present.	The grammar widens to first-person plural.

SIMPLE LOGIC

If a cause is present all the time but the effect appears only once, that constant cause does not by itself explain why the effect appears at that one point.

10.3 Why Not “I Will Make Man in My Image”?

The Reader Edition asks why singular wording was not used. “I will make man in my image” could have stated God’s role as Creator and source of the image. But it would not have expressed the continuing earthly contribution already established in verse 24.

“Let the earth bring forth man” would keep the material source in view, but it would not express humanity’s direct God-related image, likeness, and dominion. The continuation reading says “Let us make” holds both sides in one act of making.

10.4 Genesis 2:19 Keeps the Claim Honest

Animals are also formed from the ground in Genesis 2:19. So the unique feature cannot simply be “earth plus divine action.” That combination is not unique to humanity.

The distinctive Day-Six combination is narrower: the continuing earthly source is now joined in the wording to a human creature specified by image, likeness, and dominion.

STRONG ANSWER

The paper does not argue that earth plus God is unique. It argues that this particular continuation of the earth into a second creature-making stage, joined to image, likeness, and dominion, is the local arrangement that matches the one-time plural.

10.5 Why Not “Let Us” Every Time a Created Medium Participates?

Earlier commands are doing the job of identifying the medium: “Let the earth bring forth,” “Let the waters swarm.” The medium has to be named before it can remain understood in a later widened subject.

Day Six supplies that sequence. Verse 24 names the earth first. Verse 26 can then widen the subject without naming the earth again.

QUESTION: What is the “why only here?” answer in one sentence?

Answer: Because Day Six alone carries the same named earth into a second creature-making stage where humanity is now defined by image, likeness, and dominion, and the wording widens at that point.

Unit 11. Later Scripture and History: Support, Not a Shortcut

11.1 The New Testament Pattern

The Reader Edition notices that New Testament writers repeatedly discuss creation, Adam, image, the Word, and Christ without using Genesis 1:26 as their proof text for several divine persons talking to one another.

That observation does not prove the continuation reading by itself. It simply warns us not to treat the Trinitarian proof-text reading as though the apostles themselves repeatedly used the verse that way.

11.2 Ramban

Ramban, also called Nachmanides, is important because he gives a direct medieval Jewish example of God speaking with the earth in the making of humanity. He says the human is “similar to both,” bodily connected with the earth and related upward in another respect.

The Reader Edition also notes that Ramban says he found this plain reading in Rabbi Joseph Kimhi.

11.3 Joseph and David Kimhi

The Kimhi material is useful but must be handled carefully. Their interpretation includes a material-elements line, but it also includes an angelic and spiritual strand. The paper therefore does not pretend the Kimhi account is identical to its own.

11.4 Justin Martyr

Justin rejects the earth/elements reading. That is exactly why he is historically useful. His argument shows that the reading already existed and was serious enough to answer in the second century.

USE HISTORY CORRECTLY

History can show that a reading is old, possible, or debated. History does not decide the Hebrew by authority. The local Genesis context still has to carry the main argument.

11.5 The Targums

The Aramaic translation traditions also show disagreement. One preserves the plural without naming the other participant; another supplies angels. That difference illustrates the same grammatical point: the plural form itself does not name the group.

QUESTION: What is the strongest historical claim the paper makes?

Answer: An earth or elements reading is genuinely old and belongs to the history of interpretation. The paper does not claim that all ancient readers agreed with it.

Unit 12. Rival Readings

12.1 Intra-Trinitarian Speech

The Trinitarian reading says the plural reflects conversation among divine persons. The Reader Edition’s first objection is local: Genesis 1 does not introduce Father, Son, and Spirit as separate speakers and hearers inside the creation scene.

The repeated formula is simply “God said.” Before verse 26, God’s speech moves outward toward creation. The reader therefore needs a textual reason for the speech to become an inward divine conversation at verse 26.

THE LOCAL BURDEN

Later theology can tell us what a Trinitarian believes about God. It still has to show why this sentence, in this scene, has those persons as speaker and hearers.

12.2 Divine Council

The divine-council reading has an advantage over a mere royal “we”: biblical council scenes really exist. But actual council scenes are staged. Isaiah 6 shows the throne and attendants. First Kings 22 shows the heavenly host. Job introduces the sons of God.

Genesis 1 does not stage such a council before verse 26. It also gives the earth a clear role in the making while giving angels no role in Genesis 1 or Genesis 2:7.

12.3 Majesty

A “royal we” reading says God speaks as a king using plural self-reference. The Reader Edition argues that a royal first-person plural verb is not securely established as the normal explanation here. Genesis 1:29 also gives nearby singular self-reference: “I have given.”

12.4 Self-Deliberation

Self-deliberation treats the plural like a person saying, “Let us think” to himself. The paper does not say this is grammatically impossible. It says the reading faces a contextual problem: why abandon the already established outward productive relation for an unmarked inward self-address at this exact point?

12.5 Can the Earth Really Be Included if It Has No Mind?

Genesis already speaks to the earth and waters in effective creative commands. The earth does not need a human mind in order to be a real participant under God’s command.

The paper is careful here. It does not claim another biblical verse where a first-person plural clearly includes a non-personal created medium. Its warrant comes from the Day-Six discourse itself.

IMPORTANT LIMIT

Do not argue, “Hebrew first-person plural normally includes non-personal things.” The paper does not claim that. Argue instead that the grammar does not build personhood into the form, and Genesis must identify the participant from the local scene.

Unit 13. The Whole Case in One Walkthrough

1. **Genesis 1 presents one continuously speaking God, while the narrator’s verbs describing God’s actions remain singular.**
2. The chapter distinguishes God’s speech from the narrator’s report.
3. Some creative commands name no created producer. Other commands place earth or waters inside the productive action.

- 4. Day Three shows that Genesis can name the newly involved part of creation when the role changes.**
- 5.** On Day Six, verse 24 places the earth in the productive action. Verse 25 reports the result but does not name a replacement participant.
- 6.** Verse 26 changes to first-person plural: “Let us make.” Grammar proves a plural including the speaker but does not identify the other member.
- 7.** Genesis 2:7 confirms that humanity is materially from the ground.
- 8.** Verse 27 repeatedly attributes creation to God, so plural participation does not become plural creatorship.
- 9.** Image, likeness, and dominion come from God; bodily material comes from the earth. These are unequal contributions to one human whole.
- 10.** The continuation reading therefore explains the one-time plural from a one-time Day-Six arrangement already visible in the text.

THIRTY-SECOND SUMMARY

God has already put the earth inside the Day-Six work in verse 24. Verse 25 reports the result but does not replace that participant. When God next says “Let us make,” the grammar gives a real plural but does not name the other member. Genesis 2:7 confirms that the human body is from the ground, while verse 27 keeps creation singular with God. The continuation reading therefore takes the plural as God widening the ongoing work to include the earth’s material role while God alone remains Creator and source of the God-related image, likeness, calling, and dominion.

DEEPER STUDY: UNITS 14–20

For a shorter study, Unit 13 is a natural stopping point. Units 14–20 provide optional deeper analysis. They test the Trinitarian proof-text reading using one divine intellect, one divine will, relations of origin, inseparable operations, the Word-and-Hearer question, and source language. Resume with Unit 21 afterward if you are using the shorter track.

Unit 14. Why the Reader Edition Adds a Metaphysical Section

14.1 What Is Metaphysics?

Metaphysics asks what kinds of things are real and what makes them the kinds of things they are. In this Reader Edition, the metaphysical section asks a very practical question: What would have to be true for “Let us make” to be a conversation between divine persons?

The argument does not begin by saying, “The Trinity is false, therefore Genesis cannot be Trinitarian.” It asks a narrower test: if a Trinitarian uses Genesis 1:26 as a proof text for divine interpersonal conversation, does that interpretation fit the metaphysics classical Trinitarianism itself claims?

THE CONTROL RULE

An interpretation should not use one picture when reading the verse and a different picture when defending the doctrine. The same model has to do both jobs.

14.2 The Ordinary Conversation Picture

When two human beings have a conversation, we normally imagine two centers of thought. One knows or intends something, expresses it, and another receives it. If there is a proposal, one may propose and another may respond.

Classical Trinitarianism does not teach three separate divine minds and three separate divine wills. So a Trinitarian reading of Genesis 1:26 cannot simply picture three divine individuals sitting together like three human committee members.

IMPORTANT FAIRNESS RULE

Do not attack a three-minds model and pretend you have refuted classical Trinitarianism. The Reader Edition deliberately tests the stricter classical model: one divine intellect, one divine will, and one undivided outward operation.

Unit 15. One Divine Intellect: What Is Being Communicated?

15.1 What Is an Intellect?

An intellect is the power by which a rational subject knows or understands. In ordinary language, it is the knowing side of the mind.

Classical Trinitarianism says the divine act of knowing is one. It does not teach that the Father has one divine mind, the Son another, and the Spirit a third.

15.2 Why That Matters for “God Said”

If the Father and Son know by the same divine intellect, the Father cannot be pictured as having divine information that the Son does not yet possess and then passing that information across to him as another divine knower.

That does not erase personal distinction. It does create a question for the proof-text picture: what exactly is communicated from speaker to hearer if the divine cognition is numerically one?

DO NOT OVERCLAIM

The argument is not “one intellect means no personal distinction.” The argument is “one intellect means the conversation cannot be explained as information moving between two separate divine minds.”

15.3 Questions to Be Able to Answer

QUESTION: If the Father is the speaker, what makes the Son a hearer?

Answer: A Trinitarian reading must give a positive account of that speaker-hearer relation without adding a second divine intellect.

QUESTION: Does saying “they are distinct persons” answer the whole question?

Answer: No. It names the distinction but does not yet explain how one act of divine knowing functions as communication from one to another in this sentence.

Unit 16. One Divine Will: Is “Let Us Make” a Group Decision?

16.1 What Is a Will?

A will is the power of choosing, intending, or determining an action. In ordinary human group decisions, several people can each form a judgment and each choose to agree.

Classical Trinitarianism says the divine will is one. So the Father, Son, and Spirit are not three divine decision-makers who independently consider a proposal and then vote yes.

16.2 The Question for the Proof-Text Reading

“Let us make” can sound like a group proposal in normal human speech. But if there is only one divine willing, the reader cannot simply import the psychology of several human decision-makers into God.

THE REAL QUESTION

If there is no second divine act of consent, what makes the verse an interpersonal consultation rather than the expression of the one divine will?

16.3 What the Argument Is Not Saying

It is not saying that a Trinitarian must believe three wills in order to believe three persons. It is saying that the ordinary “proposal and agreement” picture depends on several acts of deciding. If the classical model denies those several acts, the interpretation must explain the conversation in another way.

Unit 17. Relations of Origin: Distinct Persons Are Not Automatically Distinct Minds

17.1 The Classical Claim

Classical Trinitarianism distinguishes the Father and Son by relation of origin. The Father is from no one. The Son is eternally from the Father.

That distinction answers a question about who is from whom. It does not by itself create another divine intellect, another divine will, or another independent source of divine thought.

17.2 Why the Reader Edition Presses This Point

A proof-text reading may say, “The Son is another person, so he can be the hearer.” The Reader Edition responds that the word “person” cannot do all the explanatory work by itself. The interpreter still has to explain what makes one side speaker and the other side hearer within one divine knowing and willing.

PLAIN-LANGUAGE VERSION

Being different in relationship is not automatically the same thing as having a different mind.

DEEPER EXPLANATION

A relation of origin can distinguish persons while leaving intellect and will numerically one. Therefore the relation itself does not automatically supply two psychological sides of a conversation.

Unit 18. One Outward Divine Operation: Why the Plural Only Once?

18.1 What Are Inseparable Operations?

Classical Trinitarianism teaches that the outward works of God are undivided. Creation is not three separate divine acts, one by the Father, one by the Son, and one by the Spirit.

The three persons may be described according to an order or relation, but the outward divine act is one.

18.2 The “Constant Cannot Explain the One-Time Change” Argument Returns

If Father, Son, and Spirit are active together in every creative act, then that joint activity is present when God says, “Let there be light,” and when God says, “Let the earth bring forth.” More specifically, if every divine speech-act expresses the same one divine will through the same Word and Spirit, then the same divine communicative structure is present every time “God said” appears.

But first-person plural grammar appears only at humanity. The Father does not become source only at verse 26, the Son does not become the Word only at verse 26, and the Spirit does not become operative only at verse 26. So the same undivided Trinitarian activity and the same divine speech-structure cannot, by themselves, explain why the grammar changes there and nowhere else.

THIS IS THE SAME LOGIC AS UNIT 10

A feature present all the time cannot by itself explain a wording change that occurs once. If the Father-source, Word, Spirit, one will, and one operation are present in every divine speech-act, that stable structure cannot by itself explain why only verse 26 widens to “us.” A verse-specific explanation is still needed.

18.3 Appropriation

A Trinitarian may answer that one common divine act can be spoken of according to a particular person or relation. This is often called appropriation. The Reader Edition’s response is not that appropriation is impossible. It asks why this particular verse receives plural grammar if the same persons and the same one operation were already present in the earlier acts.

Unit 19. The Word-and-Hearer Problem

19.1 The Basic Biblical Pattern

Scripture often describes creation as taking place by or through God’s Word. In the Reader Edition’s argument, the Word is on the expression or means side of the creative act.

If a Trinitarian also says the Son is the hearer of “Let us make,” then the Son is being assigned two roles in the same speech event: the Word through whom the creative speech proceeds and the audience to whom the speech is directed.

19.2 Why “Two Respects” Is Not Yet the Answer

A reply may say, “The Son is Word in one respect and Son addressed by the Father in another respect.” Naming two respects does not establish that Genesis assigns both roles in this speech. The Reader Edition therefore asks the textual question: where does Genesis mark those two roles here?

THE BURDEN

Naming two possible roles is not the same as showing that Genesis assigns both roles here. The second role, hearer, still has to be established from the scene.

19.3 Keep the Argument Narrow

The paper is not arguing that the Son could never be addressed in any theological model. It is arguing that Genesis 1:26 cannot be used as proof of that speaker-hearer relation unless the text itself gives a reason to identify the Son as the hearer.

Unit 20. The Father as Source and the Question of Originating Intention

20.1 What “Source” Means Here

The Reader Edition describes the Father, in the strict classical order, as personally from no one: the unoriginated source or principle. The Son is eternally from the Father and is not another source from no source. “Source” here is about origination, not about whether the Son is active or divine.

The argument then asks what the Son, as Son, independently originates. If the divine intellect and will are one, the Son does not originate another divine thought, will, purpose, or determination alongside the Father. That limits how “Let us make” can be pictured as a consultation between separate sources of counsel.

20.2 Why This Is Not the Same as Saying the Son Is Inactive

A person can be active in one common work without being a separate origin of the intention behind that work. The Reader Edition therefore distinguishes activity from originating a second divine counsel.

KEY DISTINCTION

Active does not automatically mean independently origination.

20.3 Source and Means

The Reader Edition points to biblical source-and-means patterns: the Father as the one from whom all things are, and Christ as the one through whom all things are. It also uses passages where purpose, will, and counsel are attributed to the Father while Christ is the one in whom or through whom the purpose is realized.

The point is not to deny Christ’s role. The point is to ask whether that role makes the Son another independent source of divine intention in a consultation scene.

Unit 21. After All the Metaphysics, Come Back to Genesis

21.1 Metaphysics Cannot Name an Unnamed Participant

A theological model that describes an intra-divine conversation does not thereby prove that Genesis 1:26 is such a conversation. The local text still has to identify the participants.

This is the final control. Theology can tell us what may be true of God. Exegesis still has to tell us what this sentence is doing in this narrative.

21.2 The Local Sequence Again

Verse 24: the earth is commanded to bring forth.

Verse 25: the narrator reports the result.

Verse 26: God says, “Let us make.”

No Son, Spirit, angel, or heavenly council is introduced as a hearer between those steps. The continuation reading therefore begins with the participant already active in the Day-Six work.

METAPHYSICAL CONTROL RULE

A Trinitarian proof-text reading must both fit the metaphysics it claims and identify its speaker and hearers from the Genesis scene. Metaphysics cannot replace textual identification.

Unit 22. Teach It Back: Questions and Model Answers

22.1 Foundation Questions

QUESTION: What is the first thing to separate in Genesis 1?

Answer: God’s direct speech from the narrator’s report of what happened.

QUESTION: What does Day Three teach about a change in the part of creation involved in the commanded result?

Answer: Genesis can name the newly involved part of creation when the role changes, as it does when the earth becomes the productive subject.

QUESTION: What does Day Five teach about participation?

Answer: A created medium can participate in the result while God remains Creator.

QUESTION: What does verse 25 do?

Answer: It reports the result of the animal-making stage. It does not introduce a new audience or material source.

QUESTION: What does “Let us make” prove grammatically?

Answer: The speaker is included in a first-person plural subject. The form itself does not name the other participant.

QUESTION: Why is verse 27 so important?

Answer: It keeps creation singular with God and prevents plural participation from becoming plural creatorship.

22.2 Deeper Questions

QUESTION: Why is Genesis 2:7 positive evidence rather than just an argument from silence?

Answer: Because it explicitly says the human body is formed from the ground. The earthly material source is therefore stated elsewhere in the creation account.

QUESTION: Why does “our image” not make earth a source of divinity?

Answer: Because the reading distinguishes the material source of the body from the defining God-related image, likeness, calling, and dominion.

QUESTION: Why does Genesis 2:19 matter?

Answer: It prevents the claim that “earth plus divine action” is unique to humanity. The unique claim is narrower: that continuing earth is joined in the wording to humanity’s image, likeness, and dominion.

QUESTION: What is the hardest step in the continuation reading?

Answer: Moving from the earth as the locally established continuing participant to the conclusion that the first-person plural includes that earth. The argument for that step is cumulative, not supplied by grammar alone.

Unit 23. Common Pushback and How to Answer Without Overreaching

23.1 “But ‘we’ means persons talking to persons.”

Answer: In ordinary human speech, first-person plural usually involves persons because humans normally act with other persons. But the grammar itself gives a plural subject; it does not contain a dictionary rule saying every member must be a separate rational mind. Genesis already portrays God effectively commanding non-conscious creation. The local scene still has to identify the participant.

23.2 “Isn’t the earth just the nearest noun?”

Answer: No. The case is not a nearest-word rule. The earth is an established productive participant in verse 24, the same material source continues into humanity, verse 25 does not replace it, and Day Three has already shown how Genesis can explicitly name the newly involved part of creation when the role changes.

23.3 “Why does verse 27 say ‘his image’?”

Answer: Because God is the defining source of humanity’s representative image. That does not cancel the fact that the body is from the earth. The two statements answer different questions about the same human being.

23.4 “Are you saying the earth is another creator?”

Answer: No. Verse 27 is the control. God creates. The earth has a material and subordinate productive role.

23.5 “Isn’t this just Ramban?”

Answer: No. Ramban is historical precedent, not the proof. The proof is argued from Genesis 1–2. Ramban matters because he shows that an earth-related reading is not a modern invention.

23.6 “What about Genesis 3:22, Genesis 11:7, or Isaiah 6:8?”

Answer: Those passages have to be read in their own scenes. Genesis 3:22 is a declarative comparison, not the same type of joint-action proposal. Genesis 11:7 is itself another divine plural in a different, post-flood scene, with no earth in view as the productive addressee; this guide does not use it either for or against the continuation reading. The form no more names its group there than it does in Genesis 1:26. Isaiah 6 actually stages a throne room and attendants before the plural question. Genesis 1 does not stage such a council.

23.7 “If the Son is a person, why can’t he be the hearer?”

Answer: He can be proposed as the hearer only if the interpretation shows that role in the scene. The Reader Edition’s point is not that the label “person” is meaningless. It is that classical one-intellect, one-will theology still needs a positive explanation of speaker and hearer, and Genesis still needs to identify that hearer locally.

Unit 24. Quick Review Sheet

24.1 Ten Sentences to Know

1. Genesis 1 alternates between God’s speech and the narrator’s report.
2. A narrator report does not automatically begin a new speech scene.
3. Genesis sometimes places earth or waters inside the productive action.
4. Participation does not equal creatorship.
5. Day Six places the earth in the action before “Let us make.”
6. First-person plural tells us the speaker is included, but grammar alone does not identify the other member.
7. Genesis 2:7 confirms that the human body is materially from the ground.
8. Verse 27 keeps creation singular with God.
9. The image-bearing human is one whole with bodily material from earth and defining God-related identity from God.
10. A successful reading must explain why the plural appears here and identify its participants from the local scene.

24.2 Terms You Should Be Able to Explain in Plain English

Term	Plain English
Narrator	The voice telling what happened
Subject	The person or thing the verb is about as the doer
First-person plural	The speaker plus another participant: we
Syntax	How words work together in a sentence
Discourse	How sentences connect across a passage
Grounding	What explains why a part or feature is the way it is
Efficient cause	The maker or primary agent

Material cause	What something is made from
Instrumental cause	The tool or created means used
Formal cause	The defining form or character
Final cause	The end or purpose
Inseparable operations	The classical claim that God's outward act is one undivided divine operation

Unit 25. Final Self-Test

Try answering these out loud without looking back. If you can explain them in normal language, you understand the argument. If you can only repeat technical words, go back to the simple layer.

1. Explain the difference between God's speech and narrator commentary in Genesis 1.
2. Explain why verse 25 does not automatically create a new audience.
3. Explain the difference between a created participant and a Creator.
4. Explain why the Day Three pattern matters for Day Six.
5. Explain what first-person plural tells us and what it does not tell us.
6. Explain why the earth is not chosen merely because it is the nearest noun.
7. Explain how Genesis 2:7 supports the continuation reading.
8. Explain how one human can have bodily material from earth while bearing God's image.
9. Explain the five causal questions without using the technical labels first.
10. Explain why a constant feature cannot by itself explain a one-time grammatical change.
11. Explain why Genesis 2:19 is an important qualification.
12. Explain what Ramban and Justin do and do not prove.
13. Explain the local problem for the divine-council reading.
14. Explain why one divine intellect changes how an intra-divine conversation may be pictured.
15. Explain why one divine will changes how a group-decision picture may be used.
16. Explain why relations of origin do not automatically create another divine mind.
17. **Explain why inseparable operations and the consistency of divine speech return us to the "why only here?" question.**
18. Explain the Word-and-Hearer burden.
19. Explain the difference between being active and being an independent source of counsel.
20. Give the whole continuation-plural case in under two minutes.

FINAL REMINDER

Do not defend the argument by making it stronger than the Reader Edition makes it. Its force comes from several modest points working together: local continuity, limited grammar, material confirmation, unequal causation, verse 27's singular creatorship, and the need for rival readings to identify their participants from the scene.