

GENESIS

Chapter 1

¹Job 38:4-7; Ps. 33:6;
136:5; Isa. 42:5; 45:18;
John 1:1-3; Acts 14:15;
17:24; Col. 1:16; 17; Heb.
1:10; 11:3; Rev. 4:11
²³Jer. 4:23

The Creation of the World

1 In the ^abeginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was ^bwithout form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

1:1-11:26 Primeval History. The first eleven chapters of Genesis differ from those that follow. Chapters 12–50 focus on one main family line in considerable detail, whereas chs. 1–11 could be described as a survey of the world before Abraham. These opening chapters differ not only in their subject matter from ch. 12 onward, but also because there are no real parallels to the patriarchal stories in other literatures. In contrast to the patriarchal stories, however, other ancient nonbiblical stories do exist recounting stories about both creation and the flood. The existence of such stories, however, does not in any way challenge the authority or the inspiration of Genesis. In fact, the nonbiblical stories stand in sharp contrast to the biblical account, and thus help readers appreciate the unique nature and character of the biblical accounts of creation and the flood. In other ancient literary traditions, creation is a great struggle often involving conflict between the gods. The flood was sent because the gods could not stand the noise made by human beings, yet they could not control it. Through these stories the people of the ancient world learned their traditions about the gods they worshiped and the way of life that people should follow. Babylonian versions of creation and flood stories were designed to show that Babylon was the center of the religious universe and that its civilization was the highest achieved by mankind.

Reading Genesis, readers can see that it is designed to refute these delusions. There is only one God, whose word is almighty. He has only to speak and the world comes into being. The sun and moon are not gods in their own right, but are created by the one God. This God does not need feeding by man, as the Babylonians believed they did by offering sacrifices, but he supplies man with food. It is human sin, not divine annoyance, that prompts the flood. Far from Babylon's tower (Babel) reaching heaven, it became a reminder that human pride could neither reach nor manipulate God.

These principles, which emerge so clearly in Genesis 1–11, are truths that run through the rest of Scripture. The unity of God is fundamental to biblical theology, as is his almighty power, his care for mankind, and his judgment on sin. It may not always be obvious how these chapters relate to geology and archaeology, but their theological message is very clear. Read in their intended sense, they provide the fundamental presuppositions of the rest of Scripture. These chapters should act as eyeglasses, so that readers focus on the points their author is making and go on to read the rest of the Bible in light of them.

1:1-2:3 God's Creation and Ordering of Heaven and Earth. The book of Genesis opens with a majestic description of how God first created the heavens and earth and then how he ordered the earth so that it may become his dwelling place. Structured into seven sections, each marked by the use of set phrases, the entire episode conveys the picture of the all-powerful, transcendent God who sets everything in place with consummate skill in conformity to his grand design. The emphasis is mainly on how God orders or structures everything. The structure of the account is as follows: after giving the setting (1:1-2), the author describes the six workdays (1:3-31) and the seventh day, God's Sabbath (2:1-3). Each of the six workdays follows the same pattern: it begins with "and God said," and closes with "and there was evening and

there was morning, the *n*th day." After declaring that God is the Creator of all things (1:1), the focus of the rest of Genesis 1 (beginning at 1:3) is mainly on God bringing things into existence by his word and ordering the created things ("let the waters . . . be gathered together," 1:9), rather than on how the earth was initially created (1:1). Different features indicate this. For example, vegetation is mentioned on day 3, prior to the apparent creation of the sun on day 4. Readers concerned with how to compare this passage with a modern scientific perspective should consult Introduction: Genesis and Science. Viewed in its ancient Near Eastern context, Genesis 1 says that God created everything, but it is also an account of how God has structured creation in its ordered complexity. Readers are introduced in the first three days to Day, Night, the Heavens, Earth, Seas—all these items, and only these, being specifically named by God. In days 4–6 the three distinctive regions are populated: the Heavens with lights and birds; the Seas with fish and swarming creatures; and the Earth with livestock and creeping things. God finally gives authority to human beings, as his vice-regents, to govern all these living creatures. Genesis 1 establishes a hierarchy of authority. Humanity is divinely commissioned to govern other creatures on God's behalf, the ultimate purpose being that the whole earth should become the temple of God, the place of his presence, and should display his glory.

1:1 In the beginning. This opening verse can be taken as a *summary*, introducing the whole passage; or it can be read as the *first event*, the origin of the heavens and the earth (sometime before the first day), including the creation of matter, space, and time. This second view (the origin of the heavens and the earth) is confirmed by the NT writers' affirmation that creation was from nothing (Heb. 11:3; Rev. 4:11). **God created.** Although the Hebrew word for "God," *Elohim*, is plural in form (possibly to express majesty), the verb "create" is singular, indicating that God is thought of as one being. Genesis is consistently monotheistic in its outlook, in marked contrast to other ancient Near Eastern accounts of creation. There is only one God. The Hebrew verb *bara*, "create," is always used in the OT with God as the subject; while it is not always used to describe creation out of nothing, it does stress God's sovereignty and power. **Heavens and the earth** here means "everything." This means, then, that "in the beginning" refers to the beginning of everything. The text indicates that God created everything in the universe, which thus affirms that he did in fact create it *ex nihilo* (Latin "out of nothing"). The effect of the opening words of the Bible is to establish that God, in his inscrutable wisdom, sovereign power, and majesty, is the Creator of all things that exist.

1:2 The initial description of the **earth** as being **without form and void**, a phrase repeated within the OT only in Jer. 4:23, implies that it lacked order and content. The reference to **darkness . . . over the face of the deep** points to the absence of light. This initial state will be transformed by God's creative activity: **the Spirit of God was hovering**. This comment creates a sense of expectation; something is about to happen. There is no reason to postulate that a long time elapsed between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2, during which time the earth became desolate and empty. Critical scholars argue that the word "deep" (*Heb. tehom*) is a remnant of Mesopotamian mythology from the creation account called Enuma Elish. Marduk, in fashioning the universe, had also to vanquish Tiamat, a goddess of chaos. These scholars believe that the Hebrew God had to conquer the chaos deity Tiamat in the form of the "deep" (notice the similarity of

³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶And God said, “Let there be an expanse¹ in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷And God made² the expanse and ⁸separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were ⁹above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸And God called the expanse Heaven.³ And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, ^{6a}“Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth,⁴ and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹And God said, ^{6a}“Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants⁵ yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for ‘signs and for ‘seasons,⁶ and for days and years,¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶And God ⁴made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser

¹ Or a canopy; also verses 7, 8, 14, 15, 17, 20 ² Or fashioned; also verse 16 ³ Or Sky; also verses 9, 14, 15, 17, 20, 26, 28, 30; 2:1 ⁴ Or Land; also verses 11, 12, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30; 2:1 ⁵ Or small plants; also verses 12, 29 ⁶ Or appointed times

the two words *tehom* and “Tiamat”). There are many linguistic reasons, however, for doubting a direct identification between the two. In any event, there is no conflict in Genesis or in the rest of the Bible between God and the deep, since the deep readily does God’s bidding (cf. 7:11; 8:2; Ps. 33:7; 104:6).

1:3–5 And God said. In ch. 1 the absolute power of God is conveyed by the fact that he merely speaks and things are created. Each new section of the chapter is introduced by God’s speaking. This is the first of the 10 words of creation in ch. 1. **Let there be light.** Light is the first of God’s creative works, which God speaks into existence: **the light was good** (v. 4). Everything that God brings into being is good. This becomes an important refrain throughout the chapter (see vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). **God called the light Day** (v. 5). The focus in v. 5 is on how God has ordered time on a weekly cycle; thus, “let there be light” may indicate the dawning of a new day. God is pictured working for six days and resting on the Sabbath, which is a model for human activity. Day 4 develops this idea further: the lights are placed in the heavens for signs and seasons, for the purpose of marking days and years and the seasons of the great festivals such as Passover. This sense of time being structured is further emphasized throughout the chapter as each stage of God’s ordering and filling is separated by evening and morning into specific days: **there was evening and there was morning, the first day.** The order—evening, then morning—helps the reader to follow the flow of the passage: after the workday (vv. 3–5a) there is an evening, and then a morning, implying that there is a nighttime (the worker’s daily rest) in between. Thus the reader is prepared for the next workday to dawn. Similar phrases divide ch. 1 into six distinctive workdays, while 2:1–3 make a seventh day, God’s Sabbath. On the first three days God creates the environment that the creatures of days 4–6 will inhabit; thus, sea and sky (day 2) are occupied by fish and birds created on day 5 (see chart below). By a simple reading of Genesis, these days must be described as days in the life of God, but how his days relate to human days is more difficult to determine (cf. Ps. 90:4; 2 Pet. 3:8). See further Introduction: Genesis and Science.

Location	Inhabitants
1. Light and dark	4. Lights of day and night
2. Sea and sky	5. Fish and birds
3. Fertile earth	6. Land animals (including mankind)
7. Rest and enjoyment	

³2 Cor. 4:6
⁶Job 37:18; Ps. 136:5;
Jer. 10:12; 51:15
⁷Prov. 8:27–29; Ps. 148:4
⁹Job 38:8–11; Ps. 33:7;
136:6; Jer. 5:22; 2 Pet. 3:5
¹¹Ps. 104:14
¹⁴Jer. 10:2; Ezek. 32:7, 8;
Joel 2:30, 31; 3:15; Matt. 24:29; Luke 21:25
¹⁶Deut. 4:19; Ps. 136:7–9

1:6–8 waters. Water plays a crucial role in ancient Near Eastern creation literature. In Egypt, for example, the creator-god Ptah uses the preexistent waters (personified as the god Nun) to create the universe. The same is true in Mesopotamian belief: it is out of the gods of watery chaos—Apsu, Tiamat, and Mummu—that creation comes. The biblical creation account sits in stark contrast to such dark mythological polytheism. In the biblical account, water at creation is no deity; it is simply something God created, and it serves as material in the hands of the sole sovereign Creator. As light was separated from darkness, so waters are separated to form an **expanse** (vv. 6–7), which God calls **Heaven** (v. 8). As the *esv* footnote illustrates by offering the alternative term “sky,” it is difficult to find a single English word that accurately conveys the precise sense of the Hebrew term *shamayim*, “heaven/heavens.” In this context, it refers to what humans see above them, i.e., the region that contains both celestial lights (vv. 14–17) and birds (v. 20).

1:9–13 Two further regions are organized by God: the **dry land** forming **Earth**, and the **waters** forming **Seas** (vv. 9–10). These are the last objects to be specifically named by God. God then instructs the earth to bring forth **vegetation** (vv. 11–12). While the creation of vegetation may seem out of place on day 3, it anticipates what God will later say in vv. 29–30 concerning food for both humanity and other creatures. The creation of distinctive locations days 1–3, along with vegetation, prepares for the filling of these in days 4–6.

1:14–19 This section corresponds closely with the ordering of Day and Night on the first day, involving the separation of light and darkness (vv. 3–5). Here the emphasis is on the creation of **lights** that will govern time, as well as providing **light upon the earth** (v. 15). By referring to them as the **greater light** and **lesser light** (v. 16), the text avoids using terms that were also proper names for pagan deities linked to the sun and the moon. Chapter 1 deliberately undermines pagan ideas regarding nature’s being controlled by different deities. (To the ancient pagans of the Near East, the gods were personified in various elements of nature. Thus, in Egyptian texts, the gods Ra and Thoth are personified in the sun and the moon, respectively.) The term **made** (Hb. *‘asah*, v. 16), as the *esv* footnote shows, need only mean that God “fashioned” or “worked on” them; it does not of itself imply that they did not exist in any form before this. Rather, the focus here is on the way in which God has ordained the sun and moon to order and define the passing of time according to his purposes. Thus the references to **seasons** (v. 14) or “appointed times” (*esv* footnote) and to **days and years** are probably an allusion to the appointed times and patterns in the Hebrew calendar for worship, festivals, and religious observance (Ex. 13:10; 23:15).

1:16 and the stars. The immense universe that God created (see note on

¹⁸Jer. 31:35
²¹Ps. 104:25, 26
²²Ch. 8:17; 9:1
²⁶Ch. 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8
⁷Ch. 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7;
Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10;
James 3:9
⁹Ch. 9:2; Ps. 8:6–8; James 3:7
²⁷Ch. 2:18, 21–23; 5:2;
Mal. 2:15; Matt. 19:4;
Mark 10:6
²⁸Ch. 9:1, 7

light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸to ⁹rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds¹ fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” ²¹So ⁷God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²And God blessed them, saying, “⁷Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. ²⁵And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, ^{6a}“Let us make man² in our image, ⁹after our likeness. And ⁹let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; ⁹male and female he created them.

²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, ^{6a}“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the

¹ Or flying things; see Leviticus 11:19–20 ² The Hebrew word for *man* (*adam*) is the generic term for mankind and becomes the proper name *Adam*

Isa. 40:25–26) is mentioned here only in a brief phrase, almost as if it were an afterthought. The focus of Genesis 1 is on the earth; the focus of the rest of the Bible is on man (male and female) as the pinnacle of God’s creation and the object of his great salvation.

1:20–23 Having previously described the creation of the **waters** and **expanse of the heavens**, this section focuses on how they are filled with appropriate creatures of different kinds. As reproductive organisms, they are blessed by God so that they may be fruitful and fill their respective regions.

1:21 The term for **great sea creatures** (Hb. *tannin*) in various contexts can denote large serpents, dragons, or crocodiles, as well as whales or sharks (the probable sense here). Some have suggested that this could also refer to other extinct creatures such as dinosaurs. Canaanite literature portrays a great dragon as the enemy of the main fertility god Baal. Genesis depicts God as creating large sea creatures, but they are not in rebellion against him. He is sovereign and is not in any kind of battle to create the universe.

1:24–31 This is by far the longest section given over to a particular day, indicating that day 6 is the peak of interest for this passage. The final region to be filled is the dry land, or Earth (as it has been designated in v. 10). Here a significant distinction is drawn between all the living creatures that are created to live on the dry land, and human beings. Whereas vv. 24–25 deal with the “living creatures” that the earth is to bring forth, vv. 26–30 concentrate on the special status assigned to humans.

1:24–25 livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth. These terms group the land-dwelling animals into three broad categories, probably reflecting the way nomadic shepherds would experience them: the domesticatable stock animals (e.g., sheep, goats, cattle, and perhaps camels and horses); the small crawlers (e.g., rats and mice, lizards, spiders); and the larger game and predatory animals (e.g., gazelles, lions). This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and it is hard to know where to put some animals (e.g., the domestic cat). See further Introduction: Genesis and Science.

1:26 Let us make man in our image. The text does not specify the identity of the “us” mentioned here. Some have suggested that God may be addressing the members of his court, whom the OT elsewhere calls “sons of God” (e.g., Job 1:6) and the NT calls “angels,” but a significant objection is that

man is not made in the image of angels, nor is there any indication that angels participated in the creation of human beings. Many Christians and some Jews have taken “us” to be God speaking to himself, since God alone does the making in Gen. 1:27 (cf. 5:1); this would be the first hint of the Trinity in the Bible (cf. 1:2).

1:27 There has been debate about the expression **image of God**. Many scholars point out the idea, commonly used in the ancient Near East, of the king who was the visible representative of the deity; thus the king ruled on behalf of the god. Since v. 26 links the image of God with the exercise of dominion over all the other creatures of the seas, heavens, and earth, one can see that humanity is endowed here with authority to rule the earth as God’s representatives or vice-regents (see note on v. 28). Other scholars, seeing the pattern of **male and female**, have concluded that humanity expresses God’s image in relationship, particularly in well-functioning human community, both in marriage and in wider society. Traditionally, the image has been seen as the capacities that set man apart from the other animals—ways in which humans resemble God, such as in the characteristics of reason, morality, language, a capacity for relationships governed by love and commitment, and creativity in all forms of art. All these insights can be put together by observing that the *resemblances* (man is like God in a series of ways) allow mankind to *represent* God in ruling, and to establish worthy *relationships* with God, with one another, and with the rest of the creation. This “image” and this dignity apply to *both* “male and female” human beings. (This view is unique in the context of the ancient Near East. In Mesopotamia, e.g., the gods created humans merely to carry out work for them.) The Hebrew term *‘adam*, translated as **man**, is often a generic term that denotes both male and female, while sometimes it refers to man in distinction from woman (2:22, 23, 25; 3:8, 9, 12, 20): it becomes the proper name “Adam” (2:20; 3:17, 21; 4:1; 5:1). At this stage, humanity as a species is set apart from all other creatures and crowned with glory and honor as ruler of the earth (cf. Ps. 8:5–8). The events recorded in Genesis 3, however, will have an important bearing on the creation status of humanity.

1:28 As God had blessed the sea and sky creatures (v. 22), so too he blesses humanity. **Be fruitful and multiply.** This motif recurs throughout Genesis in association with divine blessing (see 9:1, 7; 17:20; 28:3; 35:11; 48:4) and serves as the basis of the biblical view that raising faithful children is a part of God’s creation plan for mankind. God’s creation plan is that the whole earth

earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. ³⁰You shall have them for food. ³⁰And ³¹“to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The Seventh Day, God Rests

²Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and “all the host of them. ²And ³on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

The Creation of Man and Woman

⁴ ⁵These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

⁵When no ²bush of the field ¹ was yet in the land ² and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was

¹ Or open country ² Or earth; also verse 6

should be populated by those who know him and who serve wisely as his vice-regents or representatives. **subdue it, and have dominion.** The term “subdue” (Hb. *kabash*) elsewhere means to bring a people or a land into subjection so that it will yield service to the one subduing it (Num. 32:22, 29). Here the idea is that the man and woman are to make the earth’s resources beneficial for themselves, which implies that they would investigate and develop the earth’s resources to make them useful for human beings generally. This command provides a foundation for wise scientific and technological development; the evil uses to which people have put their dominion come as a result of Genesis 3. **over every living thing.** As God’s representatives, human beings are to rule over every living thing on the earth. These commands are not, however, a mandate to exploit the earth and its creatures to satisfy human greed, for the fact that Adam and Eve were “in the image of God” (1:27) implies God’s expectation that human beings will use the earth wisely and govern it with the same sense of responsibility and care that God has toward the whole of his creation.

1:31 Having previously affirmed on six occasions that particular aspects of creation are “good” (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), God now states, after the creation of the man and the woman, that **everything** he has made is **very good**; the additional **behold** invites the reader to imagine seeing creation from God’s vantage point. While many things do not appear to be good about the present-day world, this was not so at the beginning. Genesis goes on to explain why things have changed, indicating that no blame should be attributed to God. Everything he created was very good: it answers to God’s purposes and expresses his own overflowing goodness. Despite the invasion of sin (ch. 3), the material creation retains its goodness (cf. 1 Tim. 4:4).

2:1–3 These verses bring to a conclusion the opening section of Genesis by emphasizing that God has completed the process of ordering creation. The repeated comment that God **rested** does not imply that he was weary from labor. The effortless ease with which everything is done in ch. 1 suggests otherwise. Rather, the motif of God’s resting hints at the purpose of creation. As reflected in various ancient Near Eastern accounts, divine rest is associated with temple building. God’s purpose for the earth is that it should become his dwelling place; it is not simply made to house his creatures. God’s “activities” on this day (he **finished**, “rested,” “blessed,” “made it holy”) all fit this delightful pattern. The concept of the earth as a divine sanctuary, which is developed further in 2:4–25, runs throughout the whole Bible, coming to a climax in the future reality that the apostle John sees in his vision of a “new heaven and a new earth” in Rev. 21:1–22:5. **God blessed the seventh day and made it holy** (Gen. 2:3). These words provide the basis for the obligation that God placed on the Israelites to rest from their normal labor on the Sabbath day

(see Ex. 20:8–11). There is no evening-followed-by-morning refrain for this day, prompting many to conclude that the seventh day still continues (which seems to underlie John 5:17; Heb. 4:3–11).

2:4–4:26 Earth’s First People. Centered initially on the garden of Eden, the episodes that make up this part of Genesis recount how God’s ordered creation is thrown into chaos by the human couple’s disobedience. The subsequent story of Cain and Abel and then Lamech (ch. 4) shows the world spiraling downward into violence, which precipitated the flood (6:11, 13). These events are very significant for understanding not only the whole of Genesis but all of the Bible.

2:4–25 The Man and Woman in the Sanctuary of Eden. The panoramic view of creation in ch. 1 is immediately followed by a complementary account of the sixth day that zooms in on the creation of the human couple, who are placed in the garden of Eden. In style and content this section differs significantly from the previous one; it does not contradict anything in ch. 1, but as a literary flashback it supplies more detail about what was recorded in 1:27. The picture of a sovereign, transcendent deity is complemented by that of a God who is both immanent and personal. The two portrayals of God balance each other, together providing a truer and richer description of his nature than either does on its own. In a similar way, whereas ch. 1 emphasizes the regal character of human beings, ch. 2 highlights their priestly status.

2:4 These are the generations of. This is the first of 11 such headings that give structure to the book of Genesis (cf. 5:1, which varies slightly; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2; see Introduction: Arrangement of the Book). Each heading concentrates on what comes forth from the object or person named. The earliest translators of Genesis into Greek (in the Septuagint) used the word *genesis* to render the Hebrew word for “generations” (Hb. *toledot*); from this is derived the title “Genesis.” The rest of the verse is artfully arranged in a mirror (or chiasmic) form, the parts of the two poetic lines corresponding to each other in reverse order: **heavens (A), earth (B), when they were created (C), in the day that the Lord God made (C), earth (B’), heavens (A’)**. This form unifies the two parts of the chiasmus, hereby inviting the reader to harmonize 2:5–25 with 1:1–2:3. **LORD God.** Throughout 1:1–2:3 the generic word “God” was used to denote the deity as the transcendent Creator. The reader is now introduced to God’s personal name, “Yahweh” (translated as “LORD” because of the ancient Jewish tradition of substituting in Hb. the term that means “LORD” [*Adonay*] for “Yahweh” when reading the biblical text). The use of “Yahweh” throughout this passage underlines the personal and relational nature of God. The precedent for translating this as “LORD” and not “Yahweh” in English is found in the Septuagint’s customary translation (Gk. *Kyrios*, “LORD”). That translation was then quoted many times by the NT

²⁹Ch. 9:3; Ps. 104:14, 15; 145:15, 16
³⁰Ps. 147:9
³¹“Eccles. 7:29; 1 Tim. 4:4
Chapter 2
¹“Deut. 4:19; Ps. 33:6
²Ex. 20:8–11; 31:17; Deut. 5:12–14; Heb. 4:4
⁴Ch. 1:1
⁵Ch. 1:11, 12]

no man ^ato work the ground, ^band a mist ^c was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— ⁷ then the LORD God formed the man of ^d dust from the ground and ^e breathed into his ^f nostrils the breath of life, and ⁸ the man became a living creature. ⁸ And the LORD God planted a ⁹ garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. ⁸ The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, ^h and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. ¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of ⁱ Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ And the name of the third river is the ^j Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man ^k and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep

¹ Or spring

authors, who also used the Greek term *Kyrios*, “Lord,” rather than “Yahweh” for God’s name. (For more on the name “Yahweh,” see notes on Ex. 3:14; 3:15.)

2:5–7 These verses concentrate on God’s creation of a human male, amplifying 1:26–31 in particular. The main action here is God’s “forming” of the man (2:7); vv. 5–6 describe the conditions as the action took place. The term **land** (Hb. *eret*s) can refer to the whole earth (cf. *esv* footnote), to dry land (cf. 1:10), or to a specific region (cf. 2:11–13). To show the continuity with ch. 1 (see note on 2:4), and in view of the mention of **rain**, the *esv* rendering (“land”) is best. The location of this land is some unnamed place, just as the rainy season was about to begin, and thus when the ground was still dry, and without any **bush of the field**. These conditions prevailed before the creation of man, suggesting that the lack of growth was related to the absence of a man to irrigate the land (which would be the normal way in dry conditions to bring about growth). **then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground** (v. 7). The verb “formed” (Hb. *yatsar*) conveys the picture of a potter’s fashioning clay into a particular shape. The close relationship between the man and the ground is reflected in the Hebrew words used to denote them, *’adam* and *’adamah*, respectively. **breathed into his nostrils the breath of life** (v. 7). Here God breathes life—physical, mental, and spiritual—into the one created to bear his image. **living creature.** The same term in Hebrew is used in 1:20, 24 to denote sea and land creatures. While human beings have much in common with other living beings, God gives humans alone a royal and priestly status and makes them alone “in his own image” (1:27). (See Paul’s quotation of this passage in 1 Cor. 15:45.)

2:8–9 God provides a suitable environment for the man by planting a **garden in Eden, in the east**. The name “Eden,” which would have conveyed the sense of “luxury, pleasure,” probably denotes a region much greater than the garden itself. God formed the man in the “land” (see vv. 5–7), and then **put him in the garden** (cf. v. 15). The earliest translation into Greek (the Septuagint) used the word *paradeisos* (from which comes the English term “paradise”; cf. note on Luke 23:39–43) to translate the Hebrew term for “garden,” on the understanding that it resembled a royal park. The abundance of the garden is conveyed by the observation that it contained **every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food** (Gen. 2:9), which is an ironic foreshadowing of 3:6 (see note there). Two trees, however, are picked out for special mention: **the tree of life** and **the tree of the knowledge of good and evil** (2:9). Since relatively little is said about these trees, any understanding of them must be derived from the role that they play within the account of Genesis 2–3, especially ch. 3. On “tree of life,” see note on 3:22–24; on “tree of knowledge,” see note on 2:17.

2:10–14 The general description of the **river that flowed out of Eden** dividing into **four rivers** (v. 10) implies that Eden had a central location. In spite of the very specific details provided, however, Eden’s location remains a mystery. While the names **Tigris** and **Euphrates** (v. 14) are associated with the two rivers that surround Mesopotamia, the rivers **Pishon** and **Gihon**, as well as the regions of **Havilah** and **Cush** (vv. 11, 13), have not been satisfactorily identified (see map to the right). The reference to **gold** and **onyx** (vv. 11, 12) suggests that the land is rich in resources; these materials are later associated with the making of the tabernacle and temple.

2:15–16 The overall picture of Eden presented in the preceding verses suggests that the park-like garden is part of a divine sanctuary. **The man is put in the garden to work it and keep it.** The term “work” (Hb. *’abad*; cf. v. 5; 3:23; 4:2, 12; Prov. 12:11; 28:19) denotes preparing and tending, and “keep” (Hb. *shamar*) adds to that idea. Since this command comes before Adam sinned, work did not come as a result of sin, nor is it something to be avoided. Productive work is part of God’s good purpose for man in creation. Later, the same two verbs are used together of the work undertaken by the priests and Levites in the tabernacle (“minister” or “serve” [Hb. *’abad*] and “guard” [Hb. *shamar*]; e.g., Num. 3:7–8; 18:7). The man’s role is to be not only a gardener but also a guardian. As a priest, he is to maintain the sanctity of the garden as part of a temple complex. **And the LORD God commanded the man.** The fact that the command was given to Adam implies that God gave “the man” a leadership role, including the responsibility to guard and care for (“keep”) all of creation (Gen. 2:15)—a role that is also related to the leadership responsibility of Adam for Eve as his wife (cf. v. 18, “a helper fit for him”). (On the NT understanding of the relationship between husband and wife, see Eph. 5:22–33.)

The Garden of Eden

Genesis describes the location of Eden in relation to the convergence of four rivers. While two of the rivers are unknown (the Pishon and the Gihon), the nearly universal identification of the other two rivers as the Tigris and the Euphrates suggests a possible location for Eden at either their northern or southern extremes.

