

Introduction to Genesis 1

God “has made everything beautiful in its time; also, he has set eternity in [human] hearts” (Ecc 3:1).¹ Therefore, despite worshipping idols, those living in the Ancient Near East could capture glimpses of truth.² Members of those societies would have embraced several Creation accounts current in their day. Genesis 1 emerges as a very deliberate statement of the Hebrew perspective of creation over rival views.³

Moses edited preexisting material and his own writing into one coherent document shortly after the exodus.⁴ Joseph likely received the family records of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob after Jacob elevated him to the position of firstborn (Gen 49:3–4, 22–26; 1 Chr 5:1–2). This explains the lengthy treatment of Joseph’s life (Gen 37; Gen 39–50). Moses apparently utilized these documents when writing Genesis.

Coming from approximately seventy years of slavery,⁵ the people of Israel needed a reminder of the history of God’s covenant with them and their ancestors. The Bible was written for us who read it today but not to us (1 Cor 10:11). Therefore, we can gain new insights by reading the Old and New Testaments through the lenses of Ancient Near Eastern, first century Jewish, and Greco-Roman culture. When we read the Bible, we are looking over the shoulders of people living in very different cultural contexts. As we comprehend their circumstances and viewpoints, we gain a richer understanding of Scripture.⁶

Moses received his education in Egypt’s court as the son of pharaoh’s daughter. He gained unique access to the ANE myths which show close connections with Genesis 1–11 (Exod 2:1–10; Acts 7:20–22). For example, scholars date both the Atrahasis Epic from Mesopotamia and the Eridu Genesis from Sumer earlier than 1600 BC.⁷ These works exhibit commonalities with Noah’s experiences and some very important differences. By reading this ancient literature, we can better grasp what Moses sought to communicate in the text of Genesis.⁸

Genesis 1 contains several features of Hebrew poetry, especially rhyme and repetition. Note the cadence of *tohu wabohu* (“formless and empty”) in verse 2. Thus, poetic narrative best describes this genre. Since poets arrange words to elicit images in our minds which create an emotional response, our interpretation of Hebrew poetry should focus upon what the entire passage seeks to communicate.⁹

Both Augustine (354–430) and John Calvin (1509–1564) recognized that Moses wrote of these events in a way which his audience would understand, rather than in a scientific manner. Augustine charged:

“Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and the other elements of the world, about the motion and orbit of the stars and even their size and relative positions, about the predictable eclipses of the sun and moon, the cycles of the years and the

¹ Whenever an excerpt of the Bible appears in quotation marks, this is the author’s translation from the Hebrew *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) or the Greek *Novum Testamentum Graecae*, 28th ed. (NA²⁸). In order to preserve the emphasis of the biblical author, I have retained the word order whenever possible.

² Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 25.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1998), 9.

⁴ See pages xxiii–xv of the preface for additional detail about the composition and authorship of Genesis.

⁵ Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 310.

⁶ G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (ed. D. A. Carson; New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove, IL; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2004), 6.

⁷ Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 23.

⁸ John H. Walton, *Genesis* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 84.

⁹ William N. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, 2nd Ed.* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2004), 357.

seasons, about the kinds of animals, shrubs, stones, and so forth, and this knowledge he holds to as being certain from reason and experience.

“Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn.

“The shame is not so much that an ignorant individual is derided, but that people outside the household of faith think our sacred writers held such opinions, and, to the great loss of those for whose salvation we toil, the writers of our Scripture are criticized and rejected as unlearned men.

“If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven, when they think their pages are full of falsehoods on facts which they themselves have learnt from experience and the light of reason?

“Reckless and incompetent expounders of Holy Scripture bring untold trouble and sorrow on their wiser brethren when they are caught in one of their mischievous false opinions and are taken to task by those who are not bound by the authority of our sacred books. For then, to defend their utterly foolish and obviously untrue statements, they will try to call upon Holy Scripture for proof and even recite from memory many passages which they think support their position, although they understand neither what they say nor the things about which they make assertion (Cf. 1 Tim 1:7).”¹⁰

Regarding Noah’s ark, Calvin asserted:

“Moses, who had been educated in all the science of the Egyptians, was not ignorant of geometry; but since we know that Moses everywhere spoke in a homely style, to suit the capacity of the people, and that he purposely abstained from acute disputations, which might savor of the schools and of deeper learning; I can by no means persuade myself, that, in this place, contrary to his ordinary method, he employed geometrical subtlety.

“Certainly, in the first chapter, he did not treat scientifically of the stars, as a philosopher would do; but he called them, in a popular manner, according to their appearance to the uneducated, rather than according to truth, ‘two great lights.’”¹¹

In segments of our society, people have erected a false dichotomy, asserting that science and the Bible clash. Yet, scientists seek to answer how the world and humanity came into existence, while theologians ask why they were created. No true conflict exists.¹² Science reveals the process God chose to create the universe. It does not pose a threat to our faith.¹³ Therefore, the question we seek to answer when studying Genesis is “What did Moses intend to communicate to his original audience?”¹⁴

In the first chapter of the bible, each element of nature and all the animals played a role in the Lord’s plan for the world. Therefore, he described them as “good.”¹⁵ However, the climax of God’s creative work was the creation of people, those whom he made in his own

¹⁰Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (trans. John Hammond Taylor; ACW; New York: Paulist, 1982), 1:19.

¹¹John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (trans. John King; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 256–7.

¹²Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology, 3rd Ed.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 349.

¹³Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 233.

¹⁴John H. Walton, *Genesis* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 82.

¹⁵John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 88.

image. He called them to live in close fellowship with God, acting as stewards of the world he created. After making Adam and Eve, the Lord then affirmed his work as “very good.”

In the Beginning of God’s Creating

1) Gen 1:1–2: “God” (*Elohim*) can refer to any deity. However, here it depicts the sovereign originator of the whole universe.¹⁶ These verses correlate with an Egyptian funerary spell (ca. 2134–1991 BC) from the *Book of the Dead*.¹⁷ The incantation states, “I am he that closeth and he that openeth, and I am but One. I am [the sun god] Ra at his first appearance. I am the great god, self-produced; His names together compose the cycle of the gods; Resistless is he among the gods.”¹⁸

People living in Egypt believed that when the sun god formed the universe, he began to rule as king over his creation.¹⁹ Consequently, Moses’s original audience—the Israelites who had recently escaped from Egypt—understood the concept of a creator ruling over what he made. Only the identity of this Lord was new to them (Exod 3:13–14).

Due to the nuances of Hebrew grammar, specifically the vowels employed by Moses, a good translation of this passage starts with “In the beginning of God’s creating of the heavens and the earth, the earth had been formless and empty.”²⁰ The Hebrew word “*reshith*” appears fifty-one times in the Old Testament.²¹ It means “beginning of” (Cf. Gen 10:10; Gen 49:3; Deut 21:17),²² with one exception (Isa 46:10).²³

Thus, Gen 1:1 does not function as a topic sentence. It describes the state of our world at the time when the Lord began his creative work.²⁴ Typically, the term refers to a time-period, such as the year of succession of a king to the throne, rather than to a single point (Deut 11:11–12; Jer 28:1).²⁵

In the early chapters of Genesis, usually the verb “create” (*bara*) occurs in association with “bless” (*barak*). The Lord’s purpose in creating intertwined with his desire to bless (Gen 1:21–22; Gen 1:27–28; Gen 2:3–3). Although the text does not specify that God created from nothing, Ps 148:5 lends credence to the view of *ex nihilo* (“out of nothing”) creation, as does Prov 8:12, 22–31, when the personification of Wisdom speaks.²⁶

The phrase “heaven and earth” is a common Hebrew example of merism. This literary device names two opposite ends of a spectrum with the understanding that they include both them and everything in between.²⁷ In other words, God created the entire cosmos, all that exists (Isa 44:24).²⁸

¹⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 15.

¹⁷P. Le Page Renouf, *The Book of the Dead* (London: Society of Biblical Archaeology, 1904), 40, <https://archive.org/details/egyptianbookofde00reno/page/40>.

¹⁸Renouf, *The Book of the Dead*, 17, 35, <https://archive.org/details/egyptianbookofde00reno/page/n71>.

¹⁹Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 86.

²⁰Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 104.

²¹Result of Logos 7 word study on “רֵאשִׁית” (*reshith*).

²²S. Rattray and J. Milgrom, “רֵאשִׁית” (*reshith*) in *TDOT* 13:268–72, 270.

²³Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 104.

²⁴Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 104.

²⁵Walton, *Genesis*, 68–9.

²⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 14.

²⁷Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 302.

²⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 15.

Verse two opens with the perfect tense: “The earth had been (*hayah*) formless and empty,”²⁹ another indication that this sentence does not occur later in time than the first verse. In Hebrew, the perfect tense describes a completed act.³⁰ Thus, Moses described the situation before the activity of verses 3–31 commenced.³¹

Intriguingly, Gen 1:2 resembles these opening lines of the Babylonian creation epic entitled *Enuma Elish*.³²

“When on high the heaven had not been named, firm ground below had not been called by name, naught but [the] primordial [water god] Apsu, their begetter, [and the water goddess] Mummu-Tiamat, she who bore them all, their waters commingling as a single body; no reed hut had been matted, no marsh land had appeared, when no gods whatever had been brought into being, uncalled by name, their destinies undetermined.”³³

Both *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1 open by describing the state of the world before the creating began. In the Genesis account, Moses portrayed the formulation of order from disorder. Unlike other Ancient Near Eastern descriptions, he communicated no sense of forces of chaos being restrained, nor of any personified evil, such as Tiamat, the Babylonian goddess of the primordial depths.³⁴

Even though the deep waters obeyed the Lord’s commands (Ps 104:6), the combination of the words “formless” (*tohu*) and “empty” (*bohu*) still implies a dreadful situation (Isa 34:11; Jer 4:23).³⁵ However, God did not create the earth to remain in chaos (Isa 45:18),³⁶ but to function as a place of order.³⁷ Moses wrote, “And the spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.” The same Hebrew word means “wind,” “breath,” “spirit,” or “Spirit.”³⁸

This creative activity involved God at work in the organization of the cosmos, not the destructive force connoted by translating *ruakh* as “wind.”³⁹ Therefore, we can best translate *ruakh* as “Spirit” in Gen 1:2.⁴⁰ Like the glory cloud or flame appearing in other covenants (Gen 15:17; Exod 19:9; Matt 17:5; Acts 2:1–4), the Spirit acted as a divine witness to the covenant of creation.⁴¹

Due to the polytheism in surrounding nations during the Old Testament era, Moses focused upon the existence of one God. Introducing an idea such as the Trinity would have sowed confusion and tempted Israel to expand their number of gods. Israelites viewed “the spirit of the Lord” as an emanation of God’s power and authority, akin to “the hand of the Lord” (2 Ki 3:15; Ezek 1:3).⁴²

²⁹Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, “הָיָה” (*hayah*) in *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (BDB)* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 224, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/224/mode/2up>.

³⁰F. W. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar (GKC)* (ed. Emil Kautzsch; trans. Arthur Cowley; Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 309, <https://archive.org/stream/geseniushebrewgr00geseuoft#page/n3/mode/2up>.

³¹Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 116–7.

³²Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 107.

³³E. A. Speiser, trans., “Enuma Elish (The Creation Epic),” in *ANET*, 1:1–8, 60–61.

³⁴Walton, *Genesis*, 73.

³⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 15–6.

³⁶Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 109.

³⁷Walton, *Genesis*, 73.

³⁸William L. Holladay, “רוּחַ” (*ruakh*) in *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (CHALOT)* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 334–5.

³⁹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 17.

⁴⁰Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 114.

⁴¹Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 16.

⁴²Walton, *Genesis*, 76–7.

In a related language called Ugaritic, the Hebrew word for “hovering” describes the action of birds,⁴³ such as a vulture circling over an awaited feast,⁴⁴ or an eagle hovering over its brood (Deut 32:11; Matt 3:16). An Assyrian emperor described himself as one whose wings were spread like an eagle’s over his land to faithfully tend to his people.⁴⁵ Likewise, the awesome presence of God mysteriously and protectively fluttered over the primordial waters.⁴⁶

a) Read Gen 1:1–2. What was the cosmos like at the beginning of God’s creating? How was the spirit of God at work? What aspects of these verses would have surprised Moses’s original audience?

Let There Be Light

b) Gen 1:3–5: Moses arranged the first chapter of Genesis thematically, rather than in chronological order.⁴⁷ It moves from an inoperative condition of chaos into an established functional pattern.⁴⁸ The first three consist of the creation of kingdoms/habitations with a second set of three days in which God made their kings/inhabitants.⁴⁹ Thus, the first day corresponds to the fourth, the second to the fifth, and the third to the sixth:⁵⁰

light	sun, moon, and stars
seas and sky	sea creatures and birds
dry land	land animals and humans

This format combated Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) mythologies, which worshiped creation and its creatures instead of the creator on whom they ultimately depended.⁵¹ In all the ANE creation stories, the world arose in at least one of these four ways: 1) as the work of God or gods; 2) due to the spoken word; 3) from conflict with opposing forces; or 4) by self-reproduction and birth. Genesis depicts only the first two of these categories.⁵²

In God’s first recorded act in the biblical narrative, he fabricated the entire universe though his sovereign decree (Cf. Heb 11:3).⁵³ Likewise, the Egyptian god Ptah envisioned creation in his mind and then spoke it into being.⁵⁴ People in the ANE believed that things did not exist, nor did they receive their function, until someone named them.⁵⁵ Therefore, by naming and assigning purpose to creation, God demonstrated his power and authority over all he made.

⁴³Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 115.

⁴⁴Walton, *Genesis*, 78.

⁴⁵Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East*, 153.

⁴⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 17.

⁴⁷Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 25.

⁴⁸Walton, *Genesis*, 84.

⁴⁹Meredith G. Kline, “Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony,” *PSCF* 48, no. 1 (March 1996): 2–15, <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1996/PSCF3-96Kline.html>.

⁵⁰James W. Skillen, “The Seven Days of Creation,” *CTJ* 46, no. 1 (4 January 2011): 111–39, 124.

⁵¹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 61.

⁵²Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 119.

⁵³Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 61.

⁵⁴John A. Wilson, trans., “Theology of Memphis,” in *ANET*, lines 53–4, 4–6.

⁵⁵Walton, *Genesis*, 86.

A similar concept occurs in the beginning of Enuma Elish.⁵⁶ It says: “When on high the heaven had not been named, firm ground below had not been called by name, naught but primordial Apsu, their begetter, (and) Mummu Tiamat, she who bore them all, their waters commingling as a single body. No reed hut had been matted, no marsh land had appeared, when no gods whatever had been brought into being, uncalled by name, their destinies undetermined - Then it was that the gods were formed. Lahmu and Lahamu were brought forth, by name they were called.”⁵⁷

This idea parallels the Lord’s creation of light.⁵⁸ However, Moses did not deify the forces of nature but cited their obedience to God’s commands.⁵⁹ Since the people of Egypt and nearby nations routinely worshiped the sun and moon as gods,⁶⁰ Moses sought to prevent idolatry by calling them simply “lights” created by God (Gen 1:16).

Light signifies life, salvation, the Lord’s presence, and even his commands (Ps 56:13; Isa 9:2; Exod 10:22–23; Prov 6:23).⁶¹ People in the ANE considered the sun only one source of light in addition to the stars and even the moon, which all made light of their own. After all, daylight appears before the sun rises and remains visible after it sets.⁶² By not describing the creation of the sun until “a fourth day,” Moses conveyed the idea that God is the ultimate source of light (Gen 1:14–19).⁶³

He reported, “And God saw the light, that it was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.” The Lord delighted in his handiwork.⁶⁴ One of the nuances of “separated” (*badhal*) is being set apart for a specific function,⁶⁵ a concept we see repeated in Gen 1:6–7, 14, 18.⁶⁶ Light and darkness not only cannot reside together, each serves a different purpose.⁶⁷ They appear in alternating periods of time, rather than being restricted to distinct spheres.⁶⁸

Moses continued, “And God called the light ‘day,’ and the darkness he called ‘night.’” In the ANE, to give something or someone a name signified one’s authority (2 Ki 23:34).⁶⁹ By naming the light and the darkness, the Lord dethroned the celestial deities whom the Israelites had seen people worship in Egypt.⁷⁰

The creation of the sun and moon on “a fourth day” highlights the difficulty of a precise definition for the term “day.” Light had been present since “a first day.” In addition, the Hebrew word “*yom*” often loses the specific meaning “day,”⁷¹ becoming a vague term for “time” or “moment.”⁷²

⁵⁶Walton, *Genesis*, 71–2.

⁵⁷“Enuma Elish (The Creation Epic),” *ANET*, 1:1–10, 60–1.

⁵⁸Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 107.

⁵⁹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 60.

⁶⁰John A. Wilson, trans., “A Hymn to Amon-Re,” in *ANET*, 365–7.

⁶¹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 18.

⁶²Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament (IVPBBOT)* (Downers Grove, IL; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Gen 1:5–8.

⁶³Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 61.

⁶⁴Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 18.

⁶⁵Swanson, James, “*בדל*” (*badhal*), *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament) (DBLSDH)* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 976.

⁶⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 18.

⁶⁷Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 61.

⁶⁸Walton, *Genesis*, 79.

⁶⁹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 19.

⁷⁰Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3* (ed. Martin Rüter, Ilse Tödt, and John W. De Gruchy; trans. Douglas Stephen Bax; DBW; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004), 48.

⁷¹Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “*יֹמִים*” (*yom*), *BDB*, 398–401, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/398/mode/2up>.

⁷²Holladay, “*יֹמִים*” (*yom*), *CHALOT*, 529.

On each of the first five days in Gen 1, no definite article occurs before the number of each day (e.g. “a second day”). In Hebrew grammar, authors employed the word “the” (*ha*) to denote a specific person or thing.⁷³ Consequently, the syntax of Gen 1 permits a range of ideas in the length of time during which God created.⁷⁴ The lack of a definite article also permitted Moses to depict the events of days one through five in a sequence other than their chronological order for literary purposes.⁷⁵ Presenting the process in a series of “days” accommodates the finite thinking of human minds.⁷⁶

Using the same formula to conclude the account of each day, Moses wrote, “And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.”⁷⁷ On “a first day” God created time,⁷⁸ alternating periods of darkness and light. He listed evening first due to the preexisting condition of darkness.⁷⁹

Read Gen 1:3–5. What pattern occurs in Gen 1? How does Enuma Elish correspond to this passage? Why did Moses call what God created on the first day “light” when he did not make the sun until the fourth day? What features of Gen 1 make a precise definition of the word “day” extremely difficult? How can we interpret the word “day” here?

In the Beginning Was the Word

2) John 1:1–2: The opening section of the book of John reflects why the ancient church depicted this gospel as a soaring eagle. John skillfully interwove foundational Christian concepts, such as Jesus’s divinity and preexistence, with his humanity and sacrifice for our sins. In fact, the early church may have used this passage as a hymn.⁸⁰ The first words of this gospel deliberately reflect Gen 1:1. Since the opening word or two of a Hebrew bible book forms the title, the Hebrew name for Genesis means “In the Beginning of” (*bereshith*).⁸¹

By his choice of opening words, John took his readers back to the creation of the heavens and the earth.⁸² While Genesis discussed the original creation, the gospel of John expounded upon God’s new generative work (John 17:24–26).⁸³ John wrote, “In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God. He, in the beginning, was with God.” His assertion that the Word was “in the beginning” refers to Jesus’s existence before anything else was created and to his role in

⁷³Gesenius, *GKC*, 407, <https://archive.org/stream/geseniushebrewgr00geseuoft#page/406/mode/2up>.

⁷⁴Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, 49.

⁷⁵Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 77.

⁷⁶Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 61.

⁷⁷Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 19.

⁷⁸Walton, *Genesis*, 84.

⁷⁹Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 1:5.

⁸⁰Gary M. Burge, *John* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 51–2.

⁸¹Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS)* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Biblegesellschaft, 1983), 1.

⁸²D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 114.

⁸³Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 64.

originating creation (Isa 43:10–13; Col 1:15–17).⁸⁴ What is true of God is also true of the Word.⁸⁵ Everything in the universe depends upon Christ for its existence (John 1:3).⁸⁶

Unfortunately, the Greco-Roman concept of the “Word” (*Logos*) has no parallel in modern cultures,⁸⁷ making the meaning of the term difficult for us to grasp. The 6th century BC philosopher Heraclitus wrote, “This *Logos* is eternally valid, yet men are unable to understand it...all things come to pass in accordance with this *Logos*.”⁸⁸ Heraclitus viewed the Word as the impersonal, omnipresent wisdom steering all that exists, detached from all emotion,⁸⁹ the creative energy behind the rationality of the universe.⁹⁰ Stoic philosophers, such as Zeno of Citium (336–265 BC), extended the concept to include the rational soul.⁹¹ They considered the *Logos* a force which inaugurates and permeates and superintends all.⁹²

The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (20 BC–50 AD) expanded these Greco-Roman concepts of the word. For example, he wrote, “The shadow of God is his word [*logos*], which he used like an instrument when he was making the world. And this shadow...is the archetype of other things.”⁹³ Philo reckoned the *logos* as “divine reason, which is the helmsman and governor of the universe.”⁹⁴ In addition, he asserted that the *logos* is “[F]illing all things with its essence. And the word, which connects together and fastens everything, is peculiarly full of itself, having no need whatever of anything beyond.”⁹⁵ Philo also called the *logos*, “his firstborn son...the lieutenant of the great king.”⁹⁶

Therefore, when John cited Jesus as the *Logos*, he employed a term well-known to his contemporaries.⁹⁷ In the language of his era, “the word” conveyed “a communicated utterance,” “a formal account of one’s actions,” “a reflection,” or “the reason or cause of something.”⁹⁸ However, building upon the Old Testament (Ps 33:6–11),⁹⁹ John added his own twist so that the *Logos* referred to the independent expression of God as a living person, namely, Jesus.¹⁰⁰ This represented a major shift from the Greco-Roman idea that the *Logos* remained detached from human concerns. John amply demonstrated Christ’s passionate involvement in people’s lives (e.g. John 4). Indeed, Jesus identified with us so fully that he suffered and died to secure our salvation (John 1:9–14, 18; John 19:28–30; John 5:24–29).¹⁰¹

⁸⁴Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich., “ἀρχή” (*archē*) in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), 3rd. Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 138–9.

⁸⁵Burge, *John*, 54–5.

⁸⁶Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 65.

⁸⁷George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2nd Ed. (WBC; Dallas: Word, 2002), 10.

⁸⁸Heraclitus, “Fragment 1,” in *Heraclitus* (trans. Philip Wheelwright; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 19, <http://web.engr.oregonstate.edu/~funkk/Personal/logos.html#Her1>.

⁸⁹Beasley-Murray, *John*, 6.

⁹⁰Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 102.

⁹¹Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 114.

⁹²Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 103.

⁹³Philo, “Allegorical Interpretation,” in *The Works of Philo* (trans. Charles Duke Yonge; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 3.31.96, 133, <https://archive.org/stream/workspphilofjudaeu01philuoft#page/132/mode/2up>.

⁹⁴Philo, “On the Cherubim,” in *The Works of Philo* (trans. Charles Duke Yonge; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 1.11.36, 184, <https://archive.org/stream/workspphilofjudaeu01philuoft#page/184/mode/2up>.

⁹⁵Philo, “Who is the Heir of Divine Things?” in *The Works of Philo* (trans. Charles Duke Yonge; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 38.188, 130, <https://archive.org/stream/workspphilofjudaeu01philuoft#page/130/mode/2up>.

⁹⁶Philo, “On the Tilling of the Earth by Noah,” in *The Works of Philo Judaeus, Vol. 1* (trans. Charles Duke Yonge; London: Bell & Sons, 1800), 12.51, 389, <https://archive.org/details/worksofphilofjudaeu01yonguoft/page/388>.

⁹⁷Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 103.

⁹⁸Danker, et al., “λογος” (*logos*), *BDAG*, 598–601.

⁹⁹Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 115.

¹⁰⁰Danker, et al., “λογος” (*logos*), *BDAG*, 601.

¹⁰¹Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 103–4.

“The Word was near (*pros*) God,” meaning the *Logos* was in God’s presence.¹⁰² The same construction occurs in Mark 6:3,¹⁰³ where translators usually render this preposition as “with.” Given the difficulty of the Greek, “The Word was with God” best expresses John’s meaning, for “with” can express both spatial closeness and relationship.¹⁰⁴

Not only was the Word with God, “the Word was God” (*theos ēn ho logos*). Some sects hold that the lack of a definite article “the” (*ho*) before “God” (*theos*) means that “the Word was a god.” However, in Greek grammar, nouns without “the” (*ho*) occurring before “to be” verbs (*ēn*) express the nature or character of the subject. In other words, “The Word had the same nature as God,”¹⁰⁵ and he perfectly reveals God to us (Cf. Phil 2:5–11).¹⁰⁶ This grammatical form also appears in Matt 27:54. If John had written “The Word was the God” (*ho logos ēn ho theos*), he would have meant that God and the Word were the same being. However, that contradicts “the Word was with God.”¹⁰⁷ Therefore, this specific construction says that Jesus is truly God without being the same person as the Father (John 1:18; John 20:28).¹⁰⁸

John considered the preexistence of Christ so important that he repeated the idea in verse two.¹⁰⁹ A Jewish monotheist making such an assertion must have staggered his readers (Cf. Deut 6:4–9; Zech 14:9).¹¹⁰ By building this passage upon the opening lines of Genesis (Cf. Gen 1:1–2), John pointed to the involvement of the entire Trinity in creation.

a) Read John 1:1–2. How did John adapt the Greco-Roman and Jewish concepts of the *Logos* to write about Jesus? Why did the apostle omit a definite article (“the”) before the word “God” to capture the nature of Jesus’s relationship with God? How have you experienced Christ’s passionate involvement in your life?

The Light Shines in Darkness

b) John 1:3–5: John wrote, “Everything through him was made, and apart from him was made nothing which had been made.” He asserted that creation occurred through Jesus, the Word (*logos*) (John 1:1–2; Col 1:15–17; Rev 3:14).¹¹¹ By that activity God revealed himself

¹⁰²Danker, et al., “προς” (*pros*), *BDAG*, 875.

¹⁰³Beasley-Murray, *John*, 10.

¹⁰⁴Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 67.

¹⁰⁵Philip B. Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1,” *JBL* 92, no. 1 (3 January 1973): 75–87, 87, <http://digilander.libero.it/domingo7/H7.jpg>.

¹⁰⁶Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1,” 75, <http://digilander.libero.it/domingo7/H1.jpg>.

¹⁰⁷Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1,” *JBL* 92, 84–5, <http://digilander.libero.it/domingo7/H6.jpg>.

¹⁰⁸Beasley-Murray, *John*, 10–1.

¹⁰⁹Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 67.

¹¹⁰Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 69.

¹¹¹Beasley-Murray, *John*, 11.

to humanity for the first time (Heb 1:1–4).¹¹² The apostle specified that the Father did not first create Christ and then permit him to create the universe. Instead, the Word always existed.¹¹³

John implied that only the Son created, for the Father made everything “through him” (cf. 1 Cor 8:6). Yet, both remain at work in our world (John 5:17–19).¹¹⁴ What God does, the Word does, making every act of Jesus a divine enterprise (John 14:10).¹¹⁵

He wrote, “In him was life, and the life was the light of human beings. And the light in the darkness shines, and the darkness has not overcome it.” John narrowed his scope from Jesus’s work in all creation to his formation of life.¹¹⁶ Then he asserted that Christ’s activity expanded to include the new creation.¹¹⁷ Thus, “life” (*zōē*) carries a double meaning, referring to both physical and spiritual realms (John 5:24–26; John 10:10, 28–29).¹¹⁸

In the book of Isaiah, light accompanies the messiah (Isa 9:1–7; Isa 42:5–7; Isa 49:5–6).¹¹⁹ Not only does Jesus confer light and life, he embodies them (John 11:23–27; John 14:6; John 8:12; John 9:5).¹²⁰ In fact, all the light we enjoy derives from the Word.¹²¹

The apostle’s statement, “And the light in the darkness shines” encompasses the past, when the *Logos* was shining in the primordial darkness (Gen 1:1–3); John’s era, when the glory of the Word made flesh dwelt among them (John 12:35–36); and the present time, through the work of the Spirit (John 16:7–14; Matt 5:14–16).¹²² In John’s vision of the new Jerusalem, he noted, “And the city has no need of the sun nor the moon, that it might shine, for the glory of the Lord lit it, and its lamp [is] the Lamb” (Rev 21:23).

The natural antithesis of light is darkness, which the presence of light dispels in both the physical and spiritual arenas.¹²³ In this instance, spiritual darkness refers to evil (1 John 2:8–11).¹²⁴ The verb John chose to describe what the darkness failed (*katalambanō*) to do has several meanings, including “to make something one’s own,” “to grasp or comprehend,” “to gain control by seizing,” and “to surprise by coming upon.”¹²⁵ Thus, he employed a double meaning: those in darkness do not accept the light. Yet—despite their efforts—they cannot overcome it.¹²⁶

The Essenes, a Jewish sect which thrived from the mid-second century BC until 70 AD,¹²⁷ also saw its adherents as “sons of the light” engaged in mortal combat with forces of darkness but destined to prevail.¹²⁸ They asserted: “[God] has created man to govern the world and has appointed for him two spirits in which to walk until the time of His visitation: the spirits of truth and injustice. Those born of truth spring from a fountain of light, but those born of injustice spring from a source of darkness.

¹¹²Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 70.

¹¹³Burge, *John*, 55–6.

¹¹⁴Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 71.

¹¹⁵Burge, *John*, 56.

¹¹⁶Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 73.

¹¹⁷Beasley-Murray, *John*, 11.

¹¹⁸Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 73–4.

¹¹⁹Andreas J. Köstenberger, “John,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 421.

¹²⁰Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 118–9.

¹²¹Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 75.

¹²²Beasley-Murray, *John*, 11.

¹²³Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 75.

¹²⁴Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 119.

¹²⁵Danker, et al., “καταλαμβάνω” (*katalambanō*), *BDAG*, 519–20.

¹²⁶Burge, *John*, 56.

¹²⁷John J. Collins, “Essenes,” *ABD* 2:619–26, 619.

¹²⁸Craig S. Keener, *InterVarsity Press Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (IVPBCNT)* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), John 1:5.

All the children of righteousness are ruled by the Prince of Light and walk in the ways of light, but all the children of injustice are ruled by the Angel of Darkness and walk in the ways of darkness... But the God of Israel and His Angel of Truth will succor (help) all the sons of light.”¹²⁹

Throughout John’s writings, he imparts a sense of division between those experiencing authentic life with God and those existing without him.¹³⁰ Perpetual conflict between darkness and light emerges as a major theme of Jesus’s mission (John 12:46; 1 John 1:5–7).¹³¹ Although Christ experienced severe opposition—even causing his death—his crucifixion and resurrection enabled him to overcome the darkness (John 12:27–33; John 16:32–33; Col 2:13–15).¹³²

Read John 1:3–5. What themes did John employ which were likely familiar to his original audience? How does this passage affect your understanding of Gen 1:1–3? Why can we have confidence as we go through the struggles of life?

God Separates the Waters

3) Gen 1:6–8: Moses wrote, “And God said, ‘Let there be an expanse (*raqia*) in the middle of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ Then God made the expanse, and he separated the waters which [were] below the expanse and the waters which [were] above the expanse. And so it happened.”

After creating time on “a first day” (Gen 1:1–5), the Lord formed space,¹³³ asserting his power over the primordial waters by dividing them.¹³⁴ He accomplished this by spreading out the vault of heaven (Isa 40:22; Isa 44:24).¹³⁵ Some translations call this “the firmament.”¹³⁶ The Hebrew prepositions indicate that the Lord separated one type of water from another, with one kind above and a different one below this vault.¹³⁷ Thus, the Lord isolated the vapor which formed rain from the waters upon the earth.¹³⁸ An intermediate expanse regulated humidity and sunlight.¹³⁹

¹²⁹Geza Vermes, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, 4th Ed* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 1QS 3, 73, https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-Uy_BZ_QGsaLiJ4Zs/The%20Dead%20Sea%20Scrolls%20%5BComplete%20English%20Translation%5D#page/n131/mode/2up.

¹³⁰Robert Kysar, “John, The Gospel of,” *ABD* 3:912–31, 926.

¹³¹Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 76.

¹³²Burge, *John*, 56.

¹³³Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 120.

¹³⁴Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 19–20.

¹³⁵Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 122.

¹³⁶Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “רָקִיעַ” (*raqia*), *BDB*, 956, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/956/mode/2up>.

¹³⁷Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 122.

¹³⁸Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 62.

¹³⁹Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 1:8.

In keeping with Egyptian and Babylonian ideas, Israelites viewed the sky as a solid dome (Job 37:18),¹⁴⁰ possibly of glass (Ezek 1:22; Dan 12:3).¹⁴¹ For example, in the Sumerian tale *Enki and the Ordering of the World*, the author described the sky as a “well-established roof [which] reaches like the rainbow to heaven.”¹⁴² Overall, people in the Ancient Near East (ANE) believed that the cosmos consisted of three tiers: the heavens; the earth; and the underworld.¹⁴³ One Egyptian creation text describes the moment, “when the sky was separated from the earth, and when the gods ascended to heaven.”¹⁴⁴

However, *Enuma Elish* provides the greatest parallels with the “separation” in the Genesis account, though it promotes striking differences in theology. The god Marduk formed the vault from the corpse of a rebellious water goddess. Even then, he needed restraints to prevent her from unleashing her waters.¹⁴⁵ Using a word related to the Hebrew verb “separated,” (*barar*) it says, “Then the lord [Marduk] paused to view [Tiamat’s] dead body, that he might divide the monster and do artful works. He *split* her like a shellfish into two parts. Half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky, pulled down the bar and posted guards. He bade them to allow not her waters to escape.”¹⁴⁶ People believed that rain consisted of fluid leaking from the upper half of Tiamat’s body.¹⁴⁷ Normally, the vault kept those waters in place (Cf. Job 26:6–14).¹⁴⁸

A Sumerian tale about Ishkur recounts a different origin of rain. There the god Enlil commissioned his son to make clouds and to harness the winds and lightning to go before him.¹⁴⁹ In another Sumerian myth, the god Enki “summoned the two winds and the water of the heaven, he made them approach like two clouds, made their life-giving breath go to the horizon, changed the barren hills into fields.”¹⁵⁰

Similarly, the waters above fall at the Lord’s command (Ps 77:16–20). Clouds come from his storehouses at the ends of the earth, originating at the gates of heaven (Job 38:22–23; Ps 135:7).¹⁵¹ Unlike those living in the ANE, we recognize that this “vault” is not a physical entity but the way our weather system operates.¹⁵²

Moses continued, “And God called the vault ‘the heavens.’ And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.” The Hebrew language connotes the close association between the two types of water, for “heavens” is *shamayim*,¹⁵³ while “waters” is *mayim* (Ps 148:4).¹⁵⁴ Once again, the lack of a definite article (the) before the number of the day

¹⁴⁰Paul H. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part 1: The Meaning of ‘Raqia’ in Gen1:6–8,” *WTJ* 53, no. 2: 227–40, 235, https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/01-genesis/text/articles-books/seely-firmament-wtj.pdf.

¹⁴¹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 20.

¹⁴²W. Beyerlin, trans., “Enki and the Ordering of the World,” Pages 19–20 in *RANE* (ed. Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 20.

¹⁴³Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBOT*, Gen 1:8.

¹⁴⁴Samuel A. B. Mercer, trans., *The Pyramid Texts* (London: Forgotten Books, 2008), 1208c, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/egy/pyt/pyt27.htm>.

¹⁴⁵Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 123.

¹⁴⁶“Enuma Elish (The Creation Epic),” *ANET*, 4.135–40, 67. Italics mine.

¹⁴⁷Min Suc Kee, “A Study on the Dual Form of Mayim, Water,” *JBQ* 40, no. 3 (1 July 2012): 183–89, 186, http://jbnqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/403/jbnq_403_mayim.pdf.

¹⁴⁸Walton, *Genesis*, 113.

¹⁴⁹S. N. Kramer, trans., “Ishkur and the Destruction of the Rebellious Land,” in *ANET*, 577–8, lines 14–9, https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n607/mode/2up.

¹⁵⁰“Enki and the Ordering of the World,” *RANE*, 20.

¹⁵¹Walton, *Genesis*, 111.

¹⁵²Walton, *Genesis*, 112–3.

¹⁵³Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “שָׁמַיִם” (*shamay*), *BDB*, 1029, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/1028/mode/2up>.

¹⁵⁴Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “מַיִם” (*may*), 565, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/564/mode/2up>.

indicates that this account does not necessarily follow a sequence in time.¹⁵⁵ Moses omitted the phrase “and God saw that it was good” only in the account of this day, perhaps because the creation of the vault comprised a preliminary stage prior to the creation of dry ground.¹⁵⁶

Read Gen 1:6–8. How did Moses’s view of “a second day” differ from other ANE creation texts concerning the separation of the waters? What encouragement does that give you?

The Firstborn of All Creation

4) Col 1:15–18: Many New Testament (NT) scholars consider Col 1:15–20 a preexisting hymn which Paul inserted into his letter to the people of Colossae.¹⁵⁷ Structurally, it forms an A-B-C-B-A pattern called a chiasm, in which the focus lies upon the center. In this case, the emphasis falls on v. 17, which states, “And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”¹⁵⁸

This hymn begins by saying, “He is the image of the invisible God, [the] firstborn of all creation.” The term “firstborn” (*prōtotokos*) refers to the authority and preeminence of the oldest son.¹⁵⁹ It does not suggest that Christ did not always exist. Thus, he is “first in rank” (Gen 49:3; Ps 89:27),¹⁶⁰ a common situation in agrarian societies like Israel’s (Deut 21:15–17).¹⁶¹ In the context of this passage, “firstborn” signifies the supremacy of Christ over every creature, for he created everything.¹⁶² Furthermore, as the “firstborn from the dead,” he heralds the future resurrection of those belonging to him (1 Cor 15:20–22).

Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) texts apply similar terms to their deities, such as to Amon-Re in Egypt.¹⁶³ The Mesopotamian creation story Enuma Elish recounts that the first gods begotten by Apsu and Tiamat were named Lahmu and Lahamu.¹⁶⁴ Yet, after Marduk slew Tiamat, the other gods responded in this way:

“They erected for [Marduk] a princely throne. Facing his fathers, he sat down, presiding... ‘Thou, Marduk, art the most honored of the great gods, thy decree is unrivaled...From this day unchangeable shall be thy pronouncement. To raise or bring low—these shall be [in] thy hand. Thy utterance shall be true, thy command shall be unimpeachable. No one among the gods shall transgress thy bounds!

“...O Marduk, thou art indeed our avenger. We have granted thee kingship over the universe entire. When in Assembly thou sittest, thy word shall be supreme. Thy weapons shall not fail; they shall smash thy foes! O lord, spare the life of him who trusts thee, pour out the life of the god who seized evil.’

¹⁵⁵Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 62.

¹⁵⁶Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 124.

¹⁵⁷David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 90.

¹⁵⁸Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL; Leicester, England: IVP Academic; Apollos, 2001), 173.

¹⁵⁹Danker, et al., “πρωτοτοκος” (*prōtotokos*), *BDAG*, 894.

¹⁶⁰Wilhelm Michaelis, “πρωτοτοκος” (*prōtotokos*), *TDNT* 6:871–82, 871.

¹⁶¹Bill T. Arnold, “בְּחֹרֶר” (*bekhor*) in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (*NIDOTTE*), Willem VanGemeren, ed., 5 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997): 1:658–9, 658.

¹⁶²Michaelis, “πρωτοτοκος” (*prōtotokos*), *TDNT*, 6:879.

¹⁶³Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Col 1:15.

¹⁶⁴“The Creation Epic” (Enuma Elish) in *ANET*, lines 1:1–10, 61.

“Having placed in their midst the Images, they addressed themselves to Marduk, their *firstborn*, ‘Lord, truly thy decree is first among gods. Say but to wreck or create; it shall be. Open thy mouth: the Images will vanish! Speak again, and the Images shall be whole!’ At the word of his mouth the Images vanished. He spoke again, and the Images were restored. When the gods, his fathers, saw the fruit of his word, joyfully they did homage, ‘Marduk is king!’”¹⁶⁵

Although Marduk was not chronologically the firstborn, he received the supremacy and honor associated with the eldest son due to his mighty acts of valor.

According to Greek mythology, one of the five major ethnic groups in Greece originated from the union of the great god Zeus with Protogeneia (“Firstborn” in Greek).¹⁶⁶ When the lineage of Lokros was about to die out, Zeus carried Protogeneia off, impregnated her, and gave her to Lokros as his wife.¹⁶⁷ Thus, she gave birth to the first ruler of Greece.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, the Romans worshiped Fortuna Primigenia (“Firstborn” in Latin) because they viewed her as the origin of all things, the one who created the natural world which then fell into order by chance.¹⁶⁹

Concerning Jesus, Paul proclaimed, “For in him were created all things in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities. All things through him and for him were created. And he is before all things, and all things in him hold together. And he is the head of the body of the church. He is [the] beginning, [the] firstborn from the dead, that he might come to have first place in everything.”

Ingeniously, the author of this ode in Colossians focused upon the meanings which we can glean from the first word of Gen 1:1, “in the beginning of” (*bereshith*). Using four meanings of the Hebrew preposition *be* (“in,” “by,” “for,” and “through”),¹⁷⁰ the hymn writer amplified “in the beginning of” by the report that all things were created “in” Christ, “by” Christ, “for” Christ, and “through” Christ.

Furthermore, *reshith* has multiple meanings (“beginning,” “sum total,” “head,” and “first-fruits”).¹⁷¹ The author expounded upon these, saying Christ “is before all things” (beginning); “in him all things hold together” (sum total); “he is the head of the body” (“*kephalē*,” meaning the source which supplies life);¹⁷² and “the firstborn from among the dead.” As one part representing the whole of God’s people (first fruits),¹⁷³ Christ ensures our

¹⁶⁵“The Creation Epic” (Enuma Elish) in *ANET*, lines 4:1–28, 66. Italics mine.

¹⁶⁶Pausanias, *Description of Greece* (trans. W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod; LCL; Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press; Heinemann, 1918), 5.1.3, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0160%3Abook%3D5%3Achapter%3D1%3Asection%3D3>.

¹⁶⁷Pindar, *The Olympian Odes* (trans. Diane Arnson Svarlien; 1990), 9.44, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0162%3Abook%3DO.%3Apoem%3D9>.

¹⁶⁸Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 5.1.3, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0160%3Abook%3D5%3Achapter%3D1%3Asection%3D3>.

¹⁶⁹Plutarch, *Aetia Romana et Graeca (The Roman and Greek Questions)*, in *Moralia, Vol. 4* (trans. Frank Cole Babbitt; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 1.106, <http://sacred-texts.com/cla/plu/rgq/rgq12.htm>.

¹⁷⁰Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “בֵּ” (*be*), *BDB*, 88–91, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/88/mode/2up>.

¹⁷¹S. Rattray, and J. Milgrom, J. “רֵשִׁית” (*reshith*), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)*, 15 vols., G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, & H.-J. Fabry (Eds.), D. E. Green (Trans.), (Grand Rapids; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 13:268–72, 268–71.

¹⁷²F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 68.

¹⁷³C. J. H. Wright, “Family,” *ABD* 2:765–9, 765.

resurrection (1 Cor 15:12–23). Jesus fulfills every meaning of the first word in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁷⁴

Read Col 1:15–18. How is the NT concept of “firstborn” like the ANE and Jewish views? In what ways does it differ from the Greek and Roman perspectives? How does knowing that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation affect your life? Why does it matter that he is the firstborn of the dead?

The Dry Ground Appears

5) Gen 1:9–13: On the third day, the Lord began organizing what he had created in Gen 1:1–8. Moses reported, “God said, ‘Let the waters below the heavens be collected to one place and let the dry ground appear.’ And it was so. God called the dry ground ‘land,’ and the collected waters, he called ‘seas.’ And God saw that it was good.”

This separation of dry land from the seas set the parameters necessary for terrestrial life.¹⁷⁵ A strong connection exists between the two commands, for the gathering of the waters enabled the land to emerge.¹⁷⁶ The Israelites had seen something similar during their escape from Egypt (Exod 14:21–22).¹⁷⁷ In contrast to our modern view of the earth as continents surrounded by oceans, people in the Ancient Near East (ANE) saw the world as land holding bodies of water.¹⁷⁸

Unlike on previous days, on the third day God performed two separate acts of creation. He also did this on the sixth day. This maintains the literary parallelism between days one and four, days two and five, and days three and six.¹⁷⁹ “Then God said, ‘Let the earth sprout grass, [and] plants scattering seeds, [and] fruit trees bearing fruit according to their kind, which have seeds in them on the earth.’ And it was so. Then the earth grew grass [and] seed-bearing plants according to their kind, and trees bearing fruit according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.”

In the second creative act of this day, the Lord produced various types of vegetation.¹⁸⁰ God desires to reign over an infinite variety of life.¹⁸¹ Thus, he created plants and trees which reproduce “according to [their] kind, which have seeds in them.” The Hebrew term for “kind” (*min*) allows for a broader range than “species.”¹⁸² In contrast, the word “seeds” (*zera*) implies a close resemblance to the parent.¹⁸³ Significantly, God commanded reproduction “according to its kind” for plants and animals but not for humans

¹⁷⁴David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 85.

¹⁷⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 20.

¹⁷⁶Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 124–5.

¹⁷⁷Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 20.

¹⁷⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 20.

¹⁷⁹Walton, *Genesis*, 113.

¹⁸⁰Hamilton, *Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 125.

¹⁸¹Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, 57.

¹⁸²Swanson, “מין” (*min*), *DBLSDH*, 4786.

¹⁸³Desmond T. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land, 2nd Ed* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 105.

(Gen 1:24, 26).¹⁸⁴ This may indicate that God intended that vegetation and animals propagate more than the same species,¹⁸⁵ as the term “kind” does not correspond to a scientific species or genus.¹⁸⁶

The Greek translation of the Old Testament reflects this, employing the terms *homoios* (“respecting perfect agreement, resembling”) twenty times and *genos* (“race, family, direct descendant, animal class”) eleven times for the term “*min*.”¹⁸⁷ In Gen 1:11, the Greek translators opted for both terms, writing “according to kind (*genos*) and according to likeness (*homoios*).”¹⁸⁸

For the last time in this creation narrative, the Lord named what he created. Soon he would delegate that responsibility to people (Gen 2:19–20; Gen 4:1).¹⁸⁹ Once he completed the basic structure which supports life, God declared it “good.”¹⁹⁰

In contrast, Sumerians believed that the continued fertility of their land depended upon the ritual reenactment of the death and resurrection of Dumuzi, the goddess Inanna’s lover.¹⁹¹ The rite centered upon cultic prostitution, rather than upon human sacrifice. Inanna’s temples included bridal chambers where a priestess engaged in mystical marriage with the king to renew the land’s productivity.¹⁹²

However, God continually desired the production and creation of new life,¹⁹³ with what he made following his master design.¹⁹⁴ He began with a day of black and white, added the blue of ocean and sky on a second day, and now included green. Soon the earth would contain the full palette of colors.¹⁹⁵

The Mesopotamian creation account Enuma Elish follows a similar sequence of creating time, climate, and the ingredients necessary for agriculture.¹⁹⁶ Marduk, the son of the gods, appointed the days to the sun god Shamash and established night and day. Then he took saliva from the evil water goddess he had slain and used it to create clouds, winds, and fog. After that, Marduk formed mountains and the rest of the earth from Tiamat’s body before opening the deep waters and springs. “Thus, he covered [the heavens] and established the earth.”¹⁹⁷

Read Gen 1:9–13. Why did Moses record two acts of creation on the third day? How did God prepare the earth so that vegetation could grow? What is the significance of the command for plants and animals to reproduce “according to their kind”? How does the account in these verses differ from the one in Enuma Elish regarding the separation of dry ground from the waters?

¹⁸⁴P. Beauchamp, “מין” (*min*), *TDOT*, 8:288–90, 289.

¹⁸⁵P. Beauchamp, “מין” (*min*), *TDOT*, 8:289.

¹⁸⁶Mark D. Futato, “מין” (*min*), *NIDOTTE* 2:934–5, 934.

¹⁸⁷P. Beauchamp, “מין” (*min*), *TDOT*, 8:289.

¹⁸⁸Randall K. Tan, David A. DeSilva, and Isaiah Hoogendyk, eds., *The Lexham Greek-English Interlinear Septuagint: H. B. Swete Edition* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012), Gen 1:11, electronic ed.

¹⁸⁹Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 125.

¹⁹⁰Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 62.

¹⁹¹Joseph P. Healey, “Fertility Cults,” *ABD* 2:791–3, 792.

¹⁹²Joseph P. Healey, “Fertility Cults,” *ABD* 2:791–3, 792.

¹⁹³Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, 57.

¹⁹⁴Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 62.

¹⁹⁵Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 126.

¹⁹⁶Walton, *Genesis*, 114.

¹⁹⁷“The Creation Epic” (Enuma Elish) in *ANET*, lines 4.45–66, 501–2.