

Introduction to Chapter 2

Moses wrote, “In the beginning of God’s creating of the heavens and the earth, the earth had been formless and empty.” The cosmos arose from nothing, coming into being by the spoken word of God. Order emerged from disorder. Genesis 1 portrays no sense of forces of chaos being restrained, nor of any personified evil, unlike other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) depictions.¹ Even the deep waters obeyed the Lord’s commands, for the Spirit of God hovered over them, witnessing and participating in this creative activity (Gen 1:1–2).

During the first through third day, God created habitations and assigned their functions.² This demonstrated his power and authority over them.³ First, the Lord created light and separated it from darkness, establishing periods of time (Gen 1:3–5).⁴ Then, God split the primordial waters into vapor in the heavens above and liquid in the seas below (Gen 1:6–8). He collected the waters below together so that dry land appeared and produced various types of vegetation (Gen 1:9–13). This set the framework necessary for living creatures to survive.⁵

Greater and Lesser Lights

1) Gen 1:14–19: Moses wrote, “Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate day from night, and let them be for signs for appointed times, and days, and years. And let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to be light on the earth.’ And it was so.”

On “a fourth day,” God spoke to assign functions to the lights of the heavens.⁶ Here we see the first example of what the Lord formed in the second group of three days (Days 4–6). He made creatures and creations to rule over the spheres he created in the initial three days.⁷ The people of the ANE focused upon how the cosmos operated, not on its physical or chemical composition.⁸ This section of Gen 1 brilliantly employs passive argumentation—depicting what Israelites must believe—rather than directly attacking polytheistic views.⁹ In fact, Moses shocked his original audience far more by what he didn’t say than by what he proclaimed in this passage.

Most ANE peoples worshiped numerous astral gods, for they viewed the sun, the moon, and the stars as divine. Many of these deities had their own religious cults.¹⁰ Egyptians venerated the sun god Ra as the one who created everything. Meanwhile, they believed that the moon god Khonsu ruled over time and assisted Ra in forming the universe. In contrast, Gen 1 empties the cosmos of any personal traits. For example, the primordial waters in Gen 1:2 bore little resemblance to the goddess Tiamat.¹¹ Moses avoided even terms like “sun” and “moon,” because

¹Walton, *Genesis*, 73.

²Kline, “Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony,” 2–15, <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1996/PSCF3-96Kline.html>.

³Walton, *Genesis*, 71–2.

⁴Walton, *Genesis*, 79.

⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 20.

⁶Walton, *Genesis*, 125.

⁷Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 63.

⁸Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 1:19.

⁹Walton, *Genesis*, 123.

¹⁰Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 127.

¹¹Walton, *Genesis*, 123.

people in the surrounding nations worshiped them.¹²

One inscription describes the duties of the Sumerian pantheon. It says, “The great [gods of heaven, the] Igigi who parade in the sky, whose brilliance, like fire, [light]s the evening and the black night.”¹³ People worshiped the sun god Shamash as supreme among the gods, for they hailed him as the one who regulated the seasons and enabled divination of omens.¹⁴

Yet, they knew that even he did not reign as sovereign. Therefore, the author of Prayer to the Gods of the Night implored this:

“The gods of the land and the goddesses of the land, [the sun god] Shamash, [the moon god] Sin, [the storm god] Adad, and [the fertility/war goddess] Ishtar, have taken themselves to sleep in heaven. They are not pronouncing judgment; they are not deciding things. Veiled is the night; the temple and the most holy places are quiet and dark. The traveler calls on [his] god; and the litigant is tarrying in sleep. The judge of truth, the father of the fatherless, Shamash, has taken himself to his chamber. O great ones, gods of the night...O bow [star] and yoke [star], O Pleiades, Orion, and the dragon, O Ursa Major, goat [star], and the bison, stand by, and then, in the divination which I am making, in the lamb which I am offering, put truth for me.”¹⁵ Although each of these gods could respond to the prayers of the people only when visible, inhabitants of the ANE still viewed their guidance as crucial in decision-making.

In addition to separating day from night, God created these lights to act as “signs for appointed seasons,¹⁶ and for days and years” (Ps 104:19–20). This bears no resemblance to the astrology practiced by Israel’s neighbors.¹⁷ “Appointed seasons” (*moedh*) in the Old Testament (OT) refer not to summer and winter but to the prescribed religious festivals and feast days on the Hebrew calendar (Lev 23:1–6, 23–26, 33–34). The same word occurs in combination with the term for “tent” to describe the tabernacle, literally the “Tent of Meeting” (*ohel moedh*), where Israel observed sacred rites.¹⁸

Furthermore, the cycle of the moon separated each month. People tracked the movement of the stars to periodically synchronize the lunar and the solar calendars, akin to the function of our Leap Day. Otherwise, the timing of the agricultural feasts would become skewed,¹⁹ as occurs each year with the Islamic observance of Ramadan.

God pronounced, “Let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth.” The Lord create these celestial luminaries to serve, not as objects of worship. He considered this concept so important that he repeated it in reverse order (Deut 4:19).²⁰ Moses sought to strip out any reference to autonomy of the sun and the moon. Therefore, he called them, “the two great lights (*maor*), the great light to rule over the day, and the smaller light to rule over the night.” They are not gods,²¹ but the handiwork of the Lord which he designed to reign by separating day from night (Ps 96:4–6; Jer 10:10–13; Isa 40:26).²²

¹² Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 1:19.

¹³S. N. Kramer, trans., “The Duties and Powers of the Gods: Inscription on the Statue of King Kurigalzu,” in *ANET*, line C9, 59.

¹⁴Ferris J. Stephens, trans., “Hymn to the Sun-God (Great Hymn to Shamash),” in *ANET*, 387–9.

¹⁵Ferris J. Stephens, trans., “Prayer to the Gods of the Night,” in *ANET*, lines 5–24, 391.

¹⁶Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “מועד” (*moedh*), *BDB*, 417,

<https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/416/mode/2up>.

¹⁷Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 62.

¹⁸Richard E. Averbeck, “מועד” (*moedh*), *NIDOTTE* 2:873–8, 873.

¹⁹Walton, *Genesis*, 122–3.

²⁰Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 127.

²¹Walton, *Genesis*, 123.

²²Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 38.

The Hebrew word for “sun” is *shemesh*,²³ a term nearly identical to Shamash, the Sumerian sun god. In fact, the Canaanite city named Beth-shemesh means “shrine of the sun,” and “Jericho” derives from the word for “moon.”²⁴ When Moses stood on Mount Sinai, God commanded, “The names of other gods you shall not mention [and] they shall not be heard from your mouth” (Exod 23:13). Years later, Moses’s successor explained the rationale for avoiding even speaking the names of foreign gods: to prevent the nation from slipping into idolatry (Josh 23:6–8). Even so, Israel failed to resist that temptation (2 Ki 23:4–5).

In the rest of the OT, “light” (*maor*) means a celestial luminary only in Ps 74:16 and in Ezek 32:8. Where the term occurs elsewhere in the Pentateuch, it always pertains to the gold lamps in the tabernacle (e.g. Exod 35:14; Num 4:9).²⁵ Here is our first hint that God fashioned the cosmos as his temple (Cf. Isa 66:1–2).²⁶ In fact, the tabernacle resembled the four traditional cosmic elements of earth, air, water, and fire.²⁷

The Jewish historian Josephus (37–100 AD), attested this:

“When Moses distinguished the tabernacle into three parts and allowed two of them to the priests, as a place accessible and common, he denoted the land and the sea, these being of general access to all; but he set apart the third division for God, because heaven is inaccessible to men. And when he ordered twelve loaves to be set on the table, he denoted the year, as distinguished into so many months. By branching out the candlestick into seventy parts, he secretly intimated the...seventy divisions of the planets; and as to the seven lamps upon the candlesticks, they referred to the course of the planets, of which that is the number.

“The veils, too, which were composed of four things, they declared the four elements; for the fine linen was proper to signify the earth, because the flax grows out of the earth; the purple signified the sea, because that color is dyed by the blood of a sea shellfish; the blue is fit to signify the air; and the scarlet will naturally be an indication of fire.”²⁸

Consequently, both the tabernacle and the temple represented the universe.²⁹

Since people in the ANE believed that the stars controlled their destinies, Moses deliberately mentioned them as almost as an afterthought.³⁰ In the Mesopotamian creation epic Enuma Elish, Marduk gave the stars priority, placing them into constellations to organize the calendar. He then turned his attention to the moon and sun:³¹

“He constructed stations for the great gods, fixing their astral likenesses as the Images. He determined the year by designating the zones: he set up three constellations for each of the twelve months...defining the days of the year by means of heavenly figures...The Moon he caused to shine, entrusting the night to him. He appointed him a creature of the night to signify the days: ‘Monthly, without cease, form designs with a crown’...He had appointed the days to

²³ Holladay, “שֶׁמֶשׁ” (*shemesh*), *CHALOT*, 378.

²⁴ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “יָרִיחַ” (*yareakh*), *BDB*, 437, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/436/mode/2up>.

²⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 22.

²⁶ Walton, *Genesis*, 124.

²⁷ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 46.

²⁸ Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* (trans. William Whiston; The Complete Works of Flavius Josephus; Auburn and Buffalo, NY: John E. Beardsley, 1895), 3.181–4, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0146%3Abook%3D3%3Awhiston+chapter%3D7%3Awhiston+section%3D7>.

²⁹ Vern S. Polythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1991), 96.

³⁰ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 63.

³¹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 128.

Shamash and had established the precincts of night and day.³²

Moses reported, “God saw that it was good” upon the completion of his handiwork.

Read Gen 1:14–19. How did Moses seek to prevent Israel from following their neighbors in worshiping the sun, moon, and stars? What function did the Lord assign to those celestial bodies? How does knowing that the universe serves as God’s temple affect the way you view the world?

Inhabitants of the Sea and Sky

b) Gen 1:20–23: Just as the creation of light on day one corresponds to the formation of the sun, moon, and stars on day four,³³ so day two harmonizes with day five. On the second day, God separated the sky from the primordial waters. When the fifth day arrived, he created the inhabitants of those environments: aquatic creatures and birds.³⁴

This section follows the standard formula for Gen 1, except for the omission of “and it was so.”³⁵ The Lord commanded, “Let the waters swarm (*sharats*) [with] swarming living beings.” This verb usually connotes the swift chaotic movement of fish, insects, and mice (Lev 11:10, 20, 29–30). It also implies fertility. According to Exod 1:7, “the sons of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and became great and exceedingly numerous.”³⁶

The term “living beings” (*nephesh*) appears for the first time in Gen 1:20. Moses repeated it in reference to land animals in Gen 1:24 and to humanity in Gen 2:7.³⁷ Thus, it applies to all who receive the “breath of life” (Gen 1:30).

For the first time since Gen 1:1, Moses specifically wrote that “God created,”³⁸ a matter of significance since the Lord made “the great sea monsters” (*tannin*).³⁹ We think of animals such as sharks and whales. However, the Israelites associated them with the forces of anarchy whom people in the Ancient Near East (ANE) believed ruled over the primordial waters.⁴⁰ These creatures included serpents, dragons, sea monsters, and river monsters (Exod 7:10; Neh 2:13; Ps 74:12–13; Isa 27:1).⁴¹

According to a Babylonian hymn to the sun god, “The monsters of the sea look upon your light... The monsters of the sea which are full of terror, the product of the sea [and] what belongs in the deep, the spawn of the river which it produces from itself, [all] O Shamash, are in

³² “The Creation Epic” (Enuma Elish), in *ANET*, lines 5.1–6, 12–4, 6:45–6, 67–8, 501–2.

³³ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 23.

³⁴ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 129.

³⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 23.

³⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 23–4.

³⁷ Walton, *Genesis*, 127.

³⁸ Walton, *Genesis*, 126.

³⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 24.

⁴⁰ Walton, *Genesis*, 126–7.

⁴¹ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “תַּנִּין” (*tannin*), *BDB*, 1072, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/1072/mode/2up>.

your presence.”⁴² People throughout the ANE viewed these monsters as living in submission to the sun god, just as in Genesis they obey the Lord.⁴³ Ugaritic texts call the sea the enemy of the storm god Baal.⁴⁴ One poem claims that Baal crushed the sea and muzzled the dragon.⁴⁵

In Genesis, these monsters are mere creatures whom the Lord made—not chaotic rivals—⁴⁶ living under their creator’s command (Ps 148:7).⁴⁷ No hint of battle exists.⁴⁸ While Moses utilized polytheists’ imagery, he renounced their theology.⁴⁹ Therefore, he inserted, “and God created” here. Moses needed to discuss cosmic monsters of chaos for an audience steeped in ANE culture.⁵⁰ Biblical texts which refer to clashes between these forces and God point back to “the days of old” or more recent days, such as the exodus from Egypt, rather than to the time of creation (Isa 51:9–10; Ps 89:10).⁵¹

In addition to those great creatures, the Lord created “all of the living beings moving/creeping (*ramas*) about which swarm the waters.”⁵² This depicts fish and other animals which swim, wriggle, or walk along the bottom of bodies of water.⁵³ God’s statement, “And let birds fly about over the land, over the surface of the expanse of the heavens,” also suggests swarming.⁵⁴ “And God saw that it was good” acknowledges the perfection of a good creator’s work.⁵⁵

Moses reported, “Then God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and increase and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.’ There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.” This portrays the first time God spoke to someone else,⁵⁶ giving a blessing rather than performing the act of creating and naming. Moses used wordplay between “created” (*bara*) and “blessed” (*barak*) to focus upon the theological relationship of these words. Creation typically precedes blessing (Gen 1:27–28; Gen 2:3; Gen 5:2).⁵⁷ *Barak* occurs 327 times in the Old Testament, with eighty-eight of those occurrences in Genesis. This makes blessing a key theme of the book.⁵⁸

Due to God’s empowering words, those whom the creator blesses can accomplish his will.⁵⁹ By reproducing, the sea creatures and birds ruled over their realms.⁶⁰ The Lord proliferated all these creatures as a blessing, not as a difficulty for humans to overcome.⁶¹

⁴² “Hymn to the Sun-God,” *ANET*, lines 1.38, 4.3–6, 388–9.

⁴³ Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 1:20.

⁴⁴ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 130.

⁴⁵ H. L. Ginsberg, trans., “Poems About Baal and Anath,” in *ANET*, III ABA lines 7–30, 131, <https://archive.org/stream/in.gov.ignca.16119/16119#page/n115/mode/2up>.

⁴⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 24.

⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, 58.

⁴⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 130.

⁴⁹ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 63.

⁵⁰ Walton, *Genesis*, 127.

⁵¹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 130.

⁵² Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “רָמַשׁ” (*ramas*), *BDB*, 942–3, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/942/mode/2up>.

⁵³ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 129.

⁵⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 24.

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, 59.

⁵⁶ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 131.

⁵⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 23–4.

⁵⁸ Michael L. Brown, “בָּרַךְ” (*barak*), *NIDOTTE* 1:757–67, 757.

⁵⁹ J. Scharbert, “בָּרַךְ” (*barak*), *TDOT* 2:279–308, 294–5.

⁶⁰ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 63.

⁶¹ Walton, *Genesis*, 127.

Read Gen 1:20–23. Why did Moses specifically mention the great sea monsters? How is being blessed linked with being created? What impact does this have upon the way you view nature?

Living Things from the Earth

c) **Gen 1:24–25:** Moses wrote, “Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living things according to their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kind.’ And it was so.” “The sixth day” corresponds with “a third day,”⁶² as the inhabitants of dry land appeared (Cf. Gen 1:9–13).⁶³ God produced living creatures from the earth. This parallels his creation of vegetation.⁶⁴

The Hebrew term for “kind” (*min*) allows for a broader range than a species.⁶⁵ Significantly, God commanded reproduction “according to its kind” for plants and animals but not for humans (Gen 1:11, 24, 26).⁶⁶ This may indicate that God intended that vegetation and animals propagate more than the same species,⁶⁷ as the term “kind” does not correspond to a scientific species or genus.⁶⁸ The Greek translation of the Old Testament reflects this, employing the term *genos* (“race, family, direct descendant, animal class”) for the term “*min*.”⁶⁹

Animals in these verses fall into three categories.⁷⁰ The first type (*behemah*) usually refers to domestic animals. However, it occasionally depicts wild beasts, such as birds, fish, and carnivores.⁷¹ A second category (*remes*) means “creeping/ moving things,” although it can apply to all animals, including sea creatures.⁷² Carnivores often feed upon them.⁷³ The third group (*hayyah*) can mean any “living thing,”⁷⁴ although it typically refers to predators.⁷⁵

In Gen 1:28, God jointly described these three divisions as “every living thing which moves on the earth.” By constructing plants and creatures which he designed to self-propagate “according to their kind,” the creator produced creators.⁷⁶ Since the Lord imbued them with his

⁶² Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 25.

⁶³ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 132.

⁶⁴ Walton, *Genesis*, 127.

⁶⁵ Swanson, “מין” (*min*), *DBLSDH*, 4786.

⁶⁶ P. Beauchamp, “מין” (*min*), *TDOT*, 8:288–90, 289.

⁶⁷ P. Beauchamp, “מין” (*min*), *TDOT*, 8:288–90, 289.

⁶⁸ Mark D. Futato, “מין” (*min*), *NIDOTTE* 2:934–5, 934.

⁶⁹ P. Beauchamp, “מין” (*min*), *TDOT*, 8:289.

⁷⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 25.

⁷¹ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “בְּהֵמָה” (*behemah*), *BDB*, 96–7, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/96/mode/2up>.

⁷² Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “רֶמֶשׂ” (*remes*), *BDB*, 943, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/942/mode/2up>.

⁷³ Walton, *Genesis*, 127.

⁷⁴ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “חַיָּה” (*hayyah*), *BDB*, 312, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/312/mode/2up>.

⁷⁵ Walton, *Genesis*, 127.

⁷⁶ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 132.

own generative ability, he enabled them to honor God as they used that gift. Yet, if the Lord withdrew from sustaining the world, all would perish (Ps 104:27–30).⁷⁷

Commentators remain divided over the reason for the lack of a divine blessing in these verses. Most likely, God blessed sea creatures and fowl in Gen 1:22 because they inhabit different spheres from people and pose little threat to humanity.⁷⁸ However, an abundance of predatory beasts could endanger survival (Exod 23:29; Lev 26:21–22). On the other hand, the blessing in Gen 1:28–30 might include the fertility of all those whom God created on the sixth day.⁷⁹

Read Gen 1:24–25. What types of creatures were formed on the sixth day? Why do you think God did not speak words of blessing over the land animals?

⁷⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, 58–9.

⁷⁸ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 64.

⁷⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 26.