

The Two Creation Stories
Genesis 1-2

Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 1 please. Genesis has two creation stories. It is not quite right to speak of “the creation story,” because there are actually two stories, one in Genesis 1, and a second in Genesis 2.

We will compare the two stories, and then look at what each story teaches us. We’re doing this because Christians debate some aspects of these stories, and what to do about some of the things that science says. And in the process of these debates, we lose what these incredible stories are trying to teach us. We get distracted and miss the message.

Let’s see today if we can get a clearer picture of what God wants us to learn from these Scriptures. Let’s try to read them as if we didn’t know of any disagreement or debate about these stories, we just wanted to learn what God was showing us about himself and the world. Where would the stories take us?

Two Stories?

Are there are really two stories? Genesis 1:1 says, *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* In 2:1 we get a summary: *Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.* So the creating was over, and then God rested. 2:3 says that God rested from all the work of creating he had done. Creation is over.

But another story starts in 2:4: *These 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.*

The first half of v4 has been taken as the end of the first story, but it is not, it is the beginning of the second. In the book of Genesis, the line, “*these are the generations of ...*” occurs several times, and always at the beginning of a section. I will read 2:4 again, from a literal translation:

These 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. That is clearly the beginning of a creation story. If Genesis began at 2:4, we would not think that anything was missing. It’s another story.

The first creation story ends at 2:3, the second begins at 2:4, and the second just keeps going in Gen 3 and following, but creation ends at the end of Gen 2, so that’s as far as we’ll go today.

Differences Between the Two Stories This will not be the emphasis, but we should notice some of the differences.

1. *Different kind of writing.* Gen 1 is elevated prose, Gen 2 is narrative prose. Gen 1 a majestic writing and dignified, though also direct and clear. It is almost poetic, but it is not Hebrew poetry. Gen 2, Adam and Eve in the garden, is Hebrew story telling at its best. Gen 1 and Gen 2 are quite different kinds of writing.

2. *Different Method of creating.* In Gen 1, God speaks and things come into existence and they do what he tells them to do. God’s speech is front and center. But in the second story God is up close, God plants a garden, he shapes Adam out of the dirt, the way a potter would work. He stands up close and breathes into his nostrils.

He also shapes the animals out of dirt. In Gen 3, Adam and Eve hear his footsteps as God walks in the garden in the evening. In the first story God speaks and it happens, in the second story God is up close, acting a lot like a human would act. Different method of creating in the two stories.

3. *Different order of events.* In the first story, God creates plants and trees on the third day. And on the sixth day God makes first animals, then humans. Plants on day 3, animals and people on day 6. In the second story God first makes Adam the man, then God makes plants and trees, then God makes animals, and then God makes Eve the woman.

Because of some debates we’ve heard, this may disturb us, the different order of events. But I think we should relax, because what I do know is that God likes both these stories, and wants us to have them both. I don’t know how to explain the differences, but I do know that God does not care about that. The differences could actually help us understand the stories better.

4. *Duration – six days versus one day.* In the first story, creation takes six days, plus a day of rest, and in the second story, it all seems to happen in one day. 2:4 says, *These 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.*

The word “day” could mean just “when,” which some translations use, and that’s fine. But it is the same word “day.” In the first story, six days are important. In the second story, you can pick: either it all happened in one day, or else it does not matter how long it took.

5. *Different name for God.* In the first creation story, God is just “God,” every time. But from the first sentence of the second story, God is “the LORD God,” using his name, “Yahweh God” every time. In Genesis 2-3 God is called “the LORD God,” “Yahweh God,” 20 times. In the whole rest of the OT, God is called this only 16 more times.

There is something special going on in the second creation story about the name of God that is not at all in the first story. We will come back to this in the message of the second story.

We have seen five differences: 1, different style of writing; 2, different method of creating; 3, different order of events; 4, different duration, 6 days vs 1; and different name for God.

The rest of the Bible always assumes both of these stories are important. OT writers and NT writers use both stories and assume they both are true. God likes both stories just the way they are, wants us to know both just as they are, so we will leave it at that.

If you ask me questions about these things later, I will probably tell you that I don't know.

What does the first creation story show us?

1, *God creates without competitor or struggle.* There are no other gods or powers he needs to subdue, there is no battle, there is no competition. God is on his own, and does what he wants to do. It is work, he rests after, but it is good work and he enjoys what he's doing. His word is supreme, what he says happens, and that it. He creates without competitor or struggle.

2, *God commands and is obeyed.* He tells the waters above to separate from the waters below, and they obey. He tells dry ground to appear, and it does. He tells the earth to produce vegetation, and the earth produces vegetation.

He tells the lights to separate day from night, and to serve as markers for days and seasons. He commands the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night, to separate light from darkness, and that is what they always do.

He tells the waters to produce swarms of living creatures, and they do. He tells the birds to fly across the sky, and they do. And commands the water creatures and the birds to be fruitful and multiply, and that's what they do. These lines always end with, "*and it was so.*" What God makes and commands always obeys him.

He commands the earth to bring forth animals. That's a curious line isn't it? The earth obeys, it brings forth animals. He commands the animals to be fruitful and multiply, and that's what they do. *And it was so.* God commands, and creation obeys, and it is good, very good.

Gen 1 is a marvelous introduction to the Bible, in which God regularly tells people how to live. Everything else always obeys, and it is always good.

3, *The world reflects its Creator.* Everything we see shows us God. He made it, he instructed it, and it obeys. The sun and moon and stars show us the power of God's commands. Animals still are fruitful and multiply. When we plant seeds, they grow, the earth still produces plants.

Everything we see exists because of the words of God, and it obeys the words of God. Light and dark, the birds fly across the sky, all of it shows us God. The glory of the Lord fills the whole earth. The world reflects its Creator at every turn.

4, *The true nature of humanity.* People are the high point of the story. The whole sequence moves toward the creation of mankind, male and female.

People are made in the image and likeness of God. Everything God made reflects him, but with humans this goes to a new level. In some significant and profound way, male and female resemble God himself.

Mankind is to fill the earth and rule it. We are God's representative on earth, we rule over the rest in the way God rules, as a kind king, a benevolent king. What God did was good for his creatures, and so our rule over the earth should look the same way.

These are what we can learn from the first creation story: God creates without competitor or struggle. God commands and is obeyed, and it is good. This means that the world reflects its Creator at every turn. Lastly, we learn the true nature of humanity, the high point of God's creation, in his own image and likeness, to fill the earth and subdue it and rule it.

What does the second creation story show us?

1, *LORD God, the name of God.* The Creator God and Israel's covenant God are one God. God has a personal name, we're not sure how to say it, we used to say "Jehovah," now "Yahweh" seems closer to how it should be said.

In the OT, Yahweh (YHWH) is in particular "the covenant God," the God who covenanted with Abraham and later with Israel, and even later, because of Christ, with Gentile followers of Christ. YHWH is the name of the God who covenanted with his particular people.

We do not read the name of God until the first verse of the second creation story, 2:4 *These 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.*

It is the LORD-God, YHWH-God, who made the heavens and the earth. That title for God, LORD-God, occurs 20x in Gen 2-3, and only 16x in the rest of the OT. It is the particular emphasis of the second story. What this emphasizes is: **the covenant God of his particular people Israel is one and the same with the Creator God of the first creation story.**

We already assume this, which is good, but the second creation story hammers this by using "LORD-God," "YHWH-God," over and over. The covenant God of Abraham and Israel is one and the same with the God who made the heavens and the earth.

2, *The immanence of God – God is present with his creatures.* The Creator of the first story could be taken to be high above and far away. It does not say that in the first story, but it's not hard to take the story that way. This the second story corrects.

God's hands are not mentioned in the second story, but they are assumed. YHWH-God forms the man out of dirt. One naturally assumes God's hands are at work.

Then YHWH-God leans in close, and breaths life into Adam's nostrils. YHWH-God forms the animals out of dirt as well, again it is hard not to imagine God's hands at work.

In 3:8 they hear the sound of God walking in the garden in the evening. It does not say feet, but it is hard to imagine anything else. The point here is not hands or feet. The point is that YHWH-God, the Creator of the first story, is not just high above on his heavenly throne, he's close, he's down here with what he made, he's beside us.

There is quite a bit of tabernacle and temple imagery in the second story. The garden is a sacred place where YHWH-God and people can meet and are together. The second story tells us that God is not high and far away from his creation. He is immanent, close by, with us.

3, *The creation of Adam and Eve holds the story together.* Both stories make people the high point of God's creation, but they do it in different ways. In the first story, male and female are the last thing God makes, and uniquely in his own image and likeness.

In the second story people are if anything even more prominent by being the first and the last. In 2:5, there are no plants on the earth, then in 2:6-7 YHWH-God makes the man. And then in 2:8-9 God makes the plants. Then God makes the animals.

And lastly God makes the woman, Eve. So Adam is the start of creation, and Eve the end. In the second creation story, one third of the story is the creation of the woman. Even the creation of animals is part of searching for a suitable helper for Adam.

The high point of the first story is the creation of male and female in the image of God. The high point of the second story is God taking a piece of Adam's side and from that making Eve. God takes one flesh, and makes it into two, so that they can become one flesh again, in marriage. The application is that men will forsake their parents and stick to their wife.

In the second story, the creation of Adam and Eve holds the story together.

What does the second story show us? 1, LORD-God, the name of God, show us that the Creator God and Israel's covenant God are one God. 2, God is immanent, God is present with his creatures, especially with people. 3, The creation of people, Adam and Eve, holds the second creation story together.

The first creation story shows us: 1, God creates without competitor or struggle. 2, God commands and is obeyed, and it is good. 3, This means that the world reflects its Creator at every turn. 4, We learn the true nature of humanity, the high point of God's creation, in his own image and likeness, made to fill the earth and subdue it and rule it.

“Wow, God! You are amazing, you are incredible!” These stories are almost festive, they are reason to celebrate. They do not include a call to worship, but that’s clearly the natural response. Wow!

*Psalm 104 - YHWH our God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.
You made the moon to mark the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down.
You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl.
The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God.
The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens.
Then people go out to their work, to their labor until evening.
How many are your works, YHWH! In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious,
teeming with creatures beyond number—living things both large and small.
There the ships go to and fro, and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.
All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time.
When you give it to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.
When you hide your face, they are terrified;
when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.
When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.
May the glory of YHWH endure forever; may YHWH rejoice in his works—
he who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke.
We will sing to YHWH all our lives; We will sing praise to our God as long as we live.
YHWH our God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.
Amen.*