

## Two Different Creation Accounts?

Now that you've read the first two chapters of Genesis you're probably asking one of the questions just about everyone asks, "Why are there two seemingly different accounts of creation? Are they related? If so, how?"

At first glance, these two accounts may appear difficult to square up. We may even ask whether the author or editor ever wanted us to try to harmonize these two accounts in the first place. Here's the good news: we don't have to spend our time guessing. The author has left us literary clues with his answer. That answer is, "Yes, the two accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 are very much meant to be read together."

How do we know?

If you'll look at Genesis 2:4, you'll notice there is a pattern and some repetition. This pattern is called a chiasm (pronounced *kye-az-um*). Or you might hear it referred to as a "chiasmus" or "chiastic structure". Chiasms were ancient literary devices used by authors to both add artistic flare to their work and guide their audience for how to hear and understand a text.

Chiasms consist of sentence clauses which follow the structure A B B'A' (pronounced "A," "B," "A-prime," "B-prime") where the words or ideas of A coordinates with A' and B coordinates with B'.

Okay, if formulas like this give you hives and bad memories of either a math or English class gone terribly wrong, maybe an example will help:

We left in a hurry; rapidly we fled.

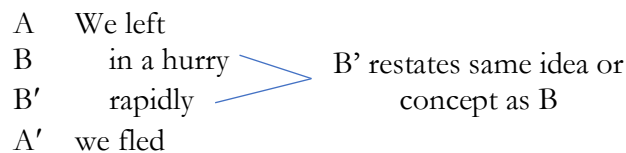
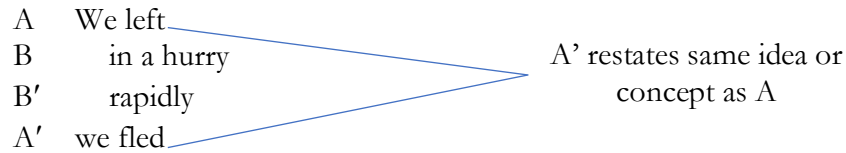
That's a chiasm.

Not so bad, right?

We could map it out as follow:

A	We left
B	in a hurry
B'	rapidly
A'	we fled

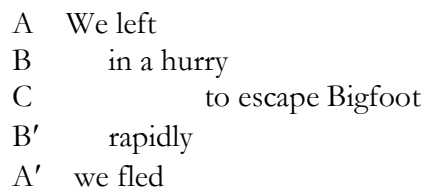
In this chiasm (A) “We left” corresponds to (A’) “we fled” and (B) “in a hurry” corresponds to (B’) “rapidly.” “We left” and “we fled” are two ways of saying the same thing, and “in a hurry” and “rapidly” are two ways of saying the same thing. Part of what constitutes a chiasm is that there is an inverted parallelism where ideas or concepts are stated, and then reversed and restated.



Why would an author take the time to do this? Seems like a lot of effort.

Remember what we said earlier about interpretation? Writers and speakers are artists. In Genesis we are dealing with literary art. Just as a painter might use a spattering and stippling technique to create the illusion of texture adding life and dimension to an otherwise flat surface, a chiasm is a tool in the toolbox of the literary artist to add some texture and pizzazz. And just as the painter uses different techniques to guide the viewers eyes and understanding, so too the writer. A chiasm serves to guide the readers understanding. To see how they do that, we need to learn one more piece of information about chiasms.

Chiasms can be even or odd. The above example fits the pattern of an even chiastic structure since it has an even number of elements – four to be exact (A, B, A', B'). But we could rewrite it to make it an odd chiasm by adding a new element (C):



Paying attention to whether a chiasm is even or odd is important because it helps determine its literary purpose. An odd chiasm often serves to draw the readers'

attention to the middle element. In our above example, the focus is on escaping Bigfoot!

On the other hand, the literary function of an even chiasm is to invite the audience to read the two halves of the chiasm together with some sort of unity. What we find in Genesis 2:4 is an even chiastic structure. I've mapped it out below:

These are the generations

A of the heavens  
B and the earth  
C when they were created  
C' in the day that the LORD God made  
B' the earth  
A' and the heavens

Since Genesis 2:4 is an even chiasm, the question left to the reader is, "What sort of unity does the author want us to see?"

Here too we're not left grappling in the dark. The artist has left us more clues with his careful choice of words helping guide the way. Here's how:

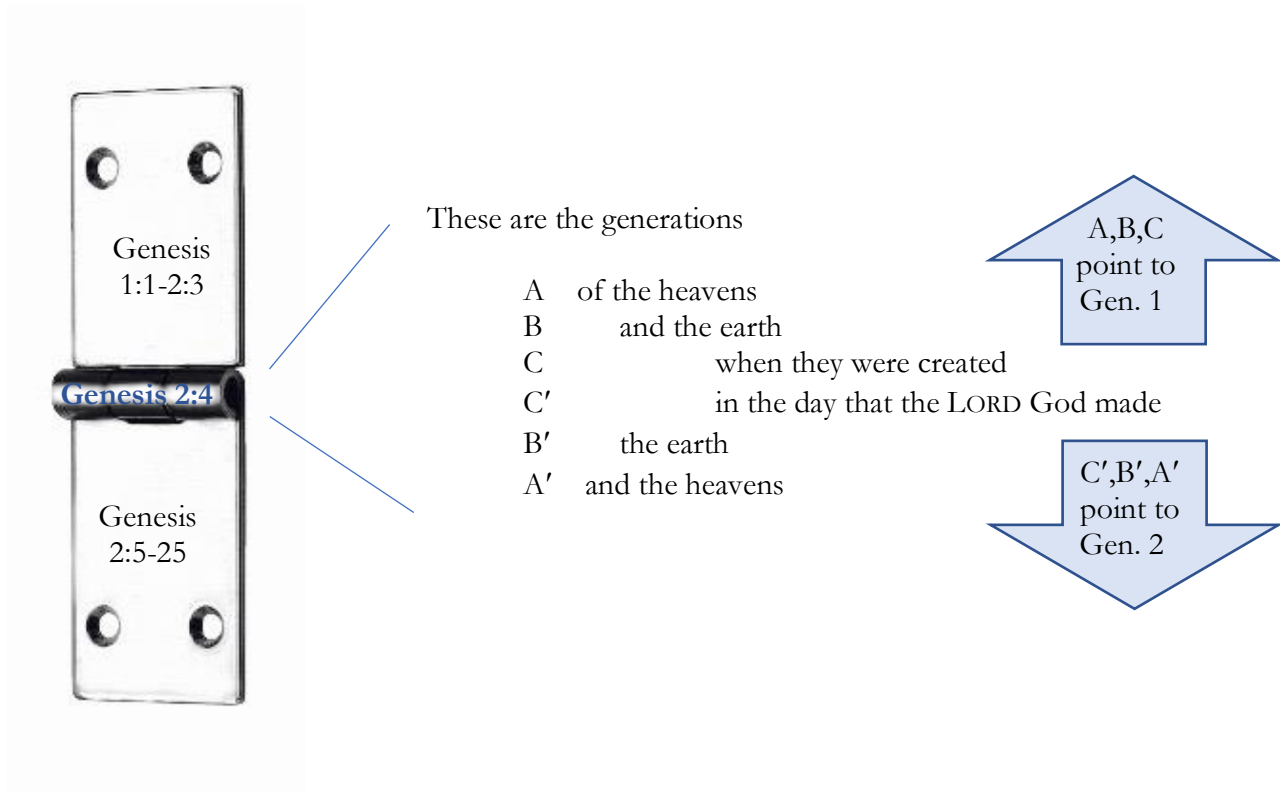
Pairing "the heavens and the earth" with the verb "created" in the first half of the chiasm echoes Genesis 1:1. Those words should sound familiar to you by now: "In the beginning God *created the heavens and the earth.*" So, elements A, B, C of the chiasm all point back to Genesis 1.

But then notice in the second half of the chiasm (C') a new divine name is introduced, "the LORD GOD." Until now, the one who created the heavens and the earth has only been referred to as "God." Genesis 2:4 now refers to the creator as the LORD God. This is the divine name used throughout the remainder of the creation account of Genesis 2:5-25. As you've already picked up on, and as other scholars have noted, this new name for God in Genesis 2:4 isn't entirely new. It's only half new. It combines "God", the name already used in 1:1-2:3, and adds to it "the LORD". With the new name, the second half of the chiasm points ahead to the Genesis 2 account of creation.

So what's the point of all this?

Glad you asked. There are a few. The first is that Genesis 1 and 2 are not two unrelated or separate accounts of creation. By employing an even structured chiasmus, and using words that connect Genesis 1 and 2, the author has invited us to harmonize and read

the two accounts together. The chiasmus in Genesis 2:4 serves as a “hinge” between Genesis 1:2-3 and Genesis 2:5-25.



The relationship between Genesis 1:2-3 and 2:5-25 seems to be that Genesis 1 gives us the big overarching picture of God creating and forming the heavens and the earth and filling them. Genesis 2, then, gives us greater detail into the events of “Day Six”. More specifically, Genesis 2 give us greater insight into God forming male and female and their special relationships. We’ll talk a little more below about some reasons why God might have done this. But for now, we can say we’re on the right track in working to harmonize Genesis 1 and 2 in describing creation. Even Jesus reads them together as a unified whole in Matthew 19:4-5 where He links together Genesis 1:1, Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 in the same breath:

And he answered them saying, “Have you not read that he who created from the beginning made them male and female and said, ‘Because of this a man shall leave father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall be one flesh.’”

If Jesus saw unity between Genesis 1 and 2, then we're on solid ground in taking His lead.

Here's the next point: remember that our original audience of Genesis 1 and 2, as the text stands today, was the Israelites who were rescued from Egypt. The name that God reveals to them when He rescues and enters into a covenant with them is the LORD (Ex. 3:3; 6:3, 6; 20:2; 34:6). We can't know for certain how swayed the Israelites were by Egyptian beliefs in the gods. If it were me, and my ancestors and I had spent generations in slavery being brutally oppressed, I know I'd have some questions about the supposed God of my ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Not least would be, What's the relationship of the LORD to the rest of creation? For the past hundred or so years, it sure seemed like the supposed gods of Egyptians were top dogs. Not to mention seeing the Egyptian magicians wielding some crazy power. Just to clear up any confusion, Genesis 1 and 2 connects the dots for the Israelites. These opening chapters of the Bible are in a sense saying, "Let me tell you who this God is. The LORD, who rescued you and is bringing you into an intimate covenant relationship with Himself is THE God – yeah that's right – the unique creator God who brought the heavens and earth into existence by mere verbal fiat. He's THAT God. That's who the LORD is. All the more why you should give Him your undivided allegiance!"

By placing Genesis 1 and 2 side by side and connecting them with the chiasmus in Genesis 2:4, God, through Moses, is teaching His people that He is both the sovereign Creator God and the LORD God who has chosen Israel to be His own people and move in close to them (Ex. 19:4-6). He is the God who stands apart from Creation (Gen. 1) and the LORD God who interacts with creation, even entering into personal relationship with human creatures (Gen. 2).

You still might be wondering, "But why two accounts? Couldn't God or Moses just have summed everything up in one, single account?" Sure. They could have. But they didn't. And while me may not know the answer for certain as to why they didn't, we can at least make informed guesses. In addition to what we've said above, we might say something about the artistry and beauty of the two accounts working together. Or we might talk about how the two accounts possibly function as a polemic against the Egyptian worldview. The Egyptians had two separate creation traditions – one for the creation of the heavens and the earth by divine word and another for the creation of animals and humans through divine forming. Through the two accounts in Genesis, the biblical author is able to thoroughly refute both traditions leaving no room for the Egyptian gods. In Genesis 1 it is the God of Israel who creates by verbal fiat, not an Egyptian god. In Genesis 2, it is still the God of Israel who formed the human creatures, not an Egyptian god. In a world where culture associated creation with an

array of gods, Genesis 1 and 2 function together to make clear there is only the One God of Israel who alone created the heavens and earth and all its inhabitants.

But what if God had even more in mind with the two accounts? What if He knows our human tendencies? I know for me I tend to drift in one of two ways in my view of God. One is to make God my best buddy. Don't hear what I'm not saying. Yes, God can certainly be a friend. He was a friend of Abraham and Moses (James 2:23; Gen. 33:11). Jesus calls His disciples friends (John 15:5). God wants that kind of relationship with us. He wants it with me. He wants it with you. But sometimes we make Him the ever-approving pal, who just happily turns a blind eye never getting too pushed out of shape over anything, including our sin. Israel makes this mistake later in the story and listen to God's words to her through the prophet Isaiah:

“What right do you have to recite my statutes  
or take my covenant on your lips?  
For you hate discipline,  
and you cast my words behind you.  
If you see a thief, you are pleased with him,  
and you keep company with adulterers.  
You give your mouth free rein for evil  
and your tongue frames deceit.  
You sit and speak against your brother;  
you slander your own mother's son.  
These things you have done, and I have been silent;  
*you thought I was one like yourself.*  
But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you.” Is. 50:16-21

I've always been haunted by the second to last line: “you though I was one like yourself.” The risk here is that we start to think God is *like us*. God starts to morph into loving all the things we love and hating all the things, people and ideas we hate. We attribute our views of the world, humanity, and, more recently, gender and sexuality to being God's. We make Him into our likeness.

Taken to the extreme, we may even begin thinking of God as being so much like us, that we drift towards pantheism (*Pan* is Greek for 'all', and you can already guess what *'theism'* means). Pantheism is the worldview that all things are god – the trees, rocks, animals are all god. We human creatures, we too are all god. You're god; I'm god. Pantheism is a blurring of the lines between the Creator and His creation.

If that's one tendency, the other is to view God as so distant and different, that we can't relate to Him. This is a move in the direction towards agnosticism or deism. An

agnostic believes that while there is a God, we can't know Him. A deist believes that while there is a God, He either doesn't have the power or care to intervene in our lives. We might think, "Oh that's not us." But again, look at our prayer lives. Do we really believe God is still active? That He can and is willing to change our circumstances? Or are we essentially deists?

Genesis 1 and 2, when read together, guard against both tendencies. Genesis 1 introduces the "God" who created the cosmos. As Creator, He stands apart from and is not in any way dependent upon creation.

God is not creation.

Creation is not God.

Sometimes theologians will refer to this as God's *transcendence*. He transcends space and time. He is bigger than creation. As such He is to be revered. The name for God in Genesis 1 in the Hebrew even lends itself to this point. In Hebrew, the name for God is *Elohim*, which is derived from a verb having to do with fear and reverence. This coincides with other appellations of God such as in Genesis 31:42 where He is referred to as "the dread of Isaac." You also may have heard that *Elohim* is plural. And it is. But this is not a numerical plural. In antiquity plural forms were not always used to express number. They could also be used to express intensity. As such, the plural *Elohim* communicates that the Creator God, the God of Israel is to be feared above all fears and receive the highest degree of reverence. He is not just our best buddy. He is the dreadful and terrifying God. He reveals Himself in clouds and thick darkness, earthquakes, fire, lightning and thunder. Deafening blasts of trumpets announce His presence. He commands armies of angels. Kings bow to Him and tremble. Kingdoms melt like wax before Him.

So that's one side of things. Now, lest we come away from all that thinking *Elohim*, as the one who stands outside of creation, is unapproachable, not able to be related to, or unknowable, now enter Genesis 2. *Elohim* is also the LORD. Whenever you see the name the LORD with small caps, this is a translation of God's personal name revealed at Sinai. You might know it as *Yahweh*. Scholars aren't quite certain how to pronounce this name. In the Hebrew text, all that appears are the consonants *Y-H-W-H*. What we do know is *YHWH* is the God who reveals Himself and intimately enters into personal and binding relationships with His human creatures. This is the God we meet in Genesis 2. He establishes a relationship with the man and the woman, speaking to them, providing for them, guiding them, and blessing them. He's the God who knows the number of hairs on your head.

So, if Genesis 1 emphasizes God's *transcendence*, scholars will say that Genesis 2 emphasizes God's *immanence*. The God who is completely different and independent of His creation (transcendent) is all the God who is involved with the intricate details of life and near to each of us (immanent).

I'm going to go out on a limb and say God knows we need both His transcendence and His immanence. We need the God of Genesis 1 and the LORD God of Genesis 2. We need the God bigger than our problems, fears, and anxieties who can do something about them, and the LORD God who knows us and tenderly calls us by name. The God who is incomparable and beyond the fullness of human comprehension, and the LORD God who allows Himself to be known. The God who refuses to be made into our image and likeness, and the LORD God who patiently shapes us into His.

Genesis 1 and 2 are not two separate creation accounts that Moses (or some later editors) pasted together willy-nilly. They are carefully and harmoniously crafted to invite us into the fullness of who God is. When we read them as such, paying attention to the literary clues like the chiasm in Genesis 2:4, we are cooperating with the inspired author, and being good readers of the Bible.

### *Questions*

**What is the purpose of the chiasm in Genesis 2:4?**

**Describe the relationship between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2?**

**What are the two different names used for God in Genesis 1 and 2? What is the significance of these names?**



**How does Genesis 1 and 2 guard against pantheism on the one hand, and deism and agnosticism on the other?**

**Which do you need to be reminded of more, God's transcendence or God's immanence's? Why?**

*Prayer*

Father, Son, Holy Spirit,

Forgive me for the times I make you into my own likeness – when I assume that my views, my thoughts, and my feelings are yours. Forgive me for the times I make you too small for my fears and worries. Forgive me for the times I believe you are too far removed or absent to care about my concerns and I fail to talk to You about them in prayer. Remind me of your vastness as the One who spoke all of creation, things both visible and invisible, into existence. Remind me that You are the one who knows me by name and invites me into the most intimate of relationships.