

GENESIS 2

None of the divisions and numberings of chapters and verses in the Bible (Old or New Testament) are in the original texts, thus Genesis 2:1–3 might be more logically included with Genesis 1.

Genesis 2:1

“The heavens and the earth” echoes Genesis 1:1, bookending the story of the days of Creation.

The word “finished” is a translation of the Hebrew word *kalah*, which means “complete” or “accomplished.” This word also means “bride” in Hebrew. It also sounds a lot like the Hebrew word *challah*, which is a Jewish braided bread eaten on the Sabbath day. This may be a pun intended by the author.

The word “host” is a translation of the Hebrew word *tsaba*, which carries the connotation of “army” or “war.” The feminine plural form of the noun is used in the name *Yahweh tsabaot*, or “Lord of hosts” or “Jehovah [leader] of the army.” The implication is that along with humans and animals, the earth itself and other heavenly bodies—the sun, moon and stars—are all part of God’s army. All of these may be included in the host who visited at the birth of Jesus in Luke 2:13: “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God.” The newborn baby Jesus is the Lord of hosts come to lead us in battle against the forces of evil.

Genesis 2:2

“Work” is the translation of the Hebrew word *m’lakot*. This word is the feminine plural of *m’lak*, which means “angel” or “messenger.” This is the same root word found in the name Malachi, which means “my

messenger.” The root suggests that much of God’s work is accomplished by His messengers, or those He has authorized to do His work. *M’lak* may also be related to the Hebrew word *melek*, which means “king.” Melchizedek (*melek tseddeq*) thus can mean “worker of righteousness,” or a righteous person doing God’s work. Compare Moses 1:39: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”

“Seventh” (*she’bi’iy*) and “rested” (*shâbat*) are both different forms of the word *sheba’*, which means “all, complete, done, or rest.” Thus, *Sabbath* connotes both “one day out of seven” and “rest or completion of work.”

Genesis 2:3

God acted in three ways on the seventh (or Sabbath) day, suggesting how we also might act on that day:

- a. He blessed it.
- b. He sanctified it, or made it holy.
- c. He rested.

One way we can remember the Sabbath day and make it holy is to enjoy and be grateful for the great works and amazing creations God finished on that day.

In a 1999 Seminaries and Institutes of Religion video, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland shared insights into how God Himself kept the Sabbath day holy:

There are at least two ideas in that verse [Genesis 2:3] that intrigued me and teach me more about my Father in Heaven. First of all, it says that God, even the greatest of all—He who has omnipotent strength and unlimited creative powers—felt the need for rest, felt the need to step away from the six days of His labor and, in so doing, to renew. Because we are created in the image of God as these very scriptures in Genesis inform us, we would do well to follow His example in all things including this one. If our Father in Heaven found renewal and serenity and strength in setting aside a day of reflection and regeneration, surely we will be benefitted as well. That’s point number one.

Point number two in this story is that God blesses the seventh day. How was it the scriptures say, or makes it holy. Because everything is so good after six days, He looks out over His handiwork and declares it not only good but very good. In fact, it’s terrific. The book of Genesis says, “And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because in it He had rested from all His work which God had created and made” [Genesis 2:2]. When He looked upon this beautiful earth and the plan of salvation that had been outlined for us here, when he looked upon the wonders of creation and all that make up the abundance of our lives, the delight of this was so evident to our Father in heaven that He just had to

stop and call a special day, literally a holy day. It was to be the best day of the seven, concluding the absolutely magnificent six other days. It was the best of the best.¹

Joshua Abraham Heschel, a leading Jewish theologian, noted that the first thing that God sanctified, or made holy, was not a thing: it was time.²

Later in scripture, both people (see Exodus 19:6) and places (see Exodus 3:5; 26:33) were described as holy, but the first thing described as holy was a day.

In the Bible, the seventh day may be a symbol of the seventh thousand-year period of earth's existence (known as the Millennium). John used several words from Genesis 2:1–3 (*heaven, earth, sea, holy, God, and bride*) in his description of the Millennium in Revelation 21:1–2.

Note that verse 3 does not end with the pattern established in Genesis 1 for all six previous days: “And the evening and the morning were the [seventh] day.” Does this suggest that the first Sabbath day never ended, and thus all of earth time is blessed and holy?

Genesis 2:4

The word “generations” is the translation of *toldot*, a form of the verb *yeled*, which means “to give birth.” This second creation story is the story of the birth of the heavens and the earth, followed by the births of Adam and of Eve. The phrase “these are the generations of” (*elah toldot*) occurs nine more times in the book of Genesis, each one listing someone's descendants.³

Note that the name for God used throughout the Garden of Eden story is “the Lord God,” or *jehovah elohim*. *Elohim* is a Hebrew plural word translated as “god.” It typically denotes strength, a bull or ox, or an oak tree (or terebinth).

Some rabbis teach that *elohim* is used in scriptural accounts that teach about obedience, law, and order. Note that *elohim* is used in the Genesis 1 Creation account; God spoke and all creation obeyed.

The King James translators used “Lord” in place of the Hebrew *YHVH* or *Yahweh* (*v* and *w* both translate the letter *vav*). This Hebrew word translates into English as “Jehovah.” German has no letter *y*, so when

¹ Jeffrey R. Holland, “‘Upon My Holy Day’ (1999),” video, 17:39, January 15, 2016, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=q9VW8PRIqFI&t=308s>.

² Joshua Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York, NY: Noonday Press, 1951), 9.

³ See Genesis 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; and 37:2.

Martin Luther was translating the Old Testament into German, *YHWH* or *Yahweh* became Jehovah. These four Hebrew letters—*YHVH*—are called the tetragrammaton, or four-letter “unspoken” name of God. This Hebrew name is spoken only by the Aaronic high priest in the temple on the Day of Atonement. Modern Hebrew Bibles use the terms *adoni* (“my Lord”) or *haShem* (“the Name”) in place of *YHVH*. The King James translators may have been copying Jewish translators when they decided to use the capitalized four-letter English word “LORD” wherever *YHVH* shows up in the Hebrew text.

For some rabbis, Jehovah is the name of God often associated with scripture stories where mercy and forgiveness are central, as in this story of Adam and Eve.

Genesis 2:5

“There was not a man to till the ground” uses word play. *Adam* translates as the generic “man” and *adamah* translates as “ground;” thus, humans are “earthlings.”

Genesis 2:7

The LORD God formed “the man” (*ha adam*) from the dust of “the ground” (*ha adamah*). *Ha* is Hebrew for the definite article “the.” Note that the man is formed (*yatsar*) from the ground, much like a potter forms a clay pot.

“Life” is the translation of the Hebrew *chaim* (from the verb *chai*, “living”). Another form of this verb is *chava* or “Eve,” the name given to the woman after the Fall.

Genesis 2:8

The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden. One might ask, “East of what?” The implication is “east of where God is.” Note that later in the scriptures, in the tabernacle and temple the high priest walked eastward out of the Holy of Holies, through the veil, into the holy place. This center room of the temple was decorated with trees and cherubim. The *menorah*, or candlestick—which is a stylized tree with a trunk, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit—stood in the middle of this garden setting.

“Eden” transliterates the Hebrew *eden*, which means “pleasure, delight, and fertility.”

Genesis 2:9

Note that the tree of life (*ets ha chaim*) and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (*ets ha-da'at tob v'rah*) are both described as “pleasant to the sight and good for food.”

Genesis 2:10–14

The names of these four rivers suggest a Middle Eastern or North African setting for the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 2:15

“Dress” is the translation of the Hebrew *avodah*, which means “to work, labor, serve or worship” (perhaps invoking temple work). “Keep” is the translation of the Hebrew *shomer*, which means “to guard or protect, to observe.” These words will later be used in scripture to describe serving God and keeping His commandments.

Genesis 2:18

“Help meet” is not one word but two. They describe someone who is “a helper suited to the task.” Note that in the Old Testament, one who helps is not subordinate to the person they are assisting; rather, they have skills or knowledge needed for a task. The person most often described in the biblical text as “a helper” is God.

Genesis 2:21–22

The Hebrew word *tsela* is translated as “rib” only in these two verses. The other forty times it is used in the Old Testament refer to architectural structures, such as side rooms of the temple, the side walls of the temple lined with cedar, the two sides or leaves of the temple doors, and the sides of the ark of the covenant.

Genesis 2:22

“Made” is a translation of the Hebrew *banah*, which is better translated as “built.” This verb is also the root meaning of the Hebrew words *ben* (“son”), *eben* (“stone”), and *beth* (“house, family or daughter”). The Hebrew idiom “to be built up” (used of women like Sarah in Genesis 16:2 or Rachel in Genesis 30:3) means “to become the mother of a family or to acquire children.”

Genesis 2:23

“Bone” is the translation of the Hebrew *etsem*, which may be related to the Hebrew word *ets*, which means “tree or wood.” Sometimes a human skeleton is poetically compared to a tree growing inside a person.

Genesis 2:24

“Cleave” is the translation of the Hebrew *dabaq*, which also describes our relationship with God. In Deuteronomy 13:4, several words from Genesis 2 are used: “Ye shall walk after the LORD [*yhvh*] your God [*elohim*], and fear him, and keep [*shomer*] his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve [*avodah*] him, and cleave [*dabaq*] unto him.”

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