Observations about Genesis 1:1–2:3

In the beginning, God created the universe out of nothing (Latin: ex nihilo). Consider these observations about the Genesis account.

- The oldest copies of Genesis are written in Hebrew. The Hebrew verb for “create” is used in the Bible only to describe God’s work, never human’s, affirming that only God truly creates out of nothing.
- The plural noun translated as “us” in Genesis 1:26 (“Let Us make man in Our image”) points to our triune God’s involvement in creation, as affirmed in other Bible verses (John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:16; Genesis 1:2).
- God first created light on the first day and separated light from darkness.
- The order that God created creatures closely matches scientific suggestions: water creatures, birds; livestock, creeping things, beasts, humans.
- Genesis shows God’s organized, orderly work, not chaos, as some theorize. Nature maintains rhythms and patterns. Our cells use elaborate systems, intricate sequences, and complex combinations of proteins, bacteria, and other substances. Our world, its creatures and its systems, are too complex and interrelated to erupt or evolve by accident.
- Roger Penrose, British mathematician and co-worker of Stephen Hawking, calculated the probability of an orderly universe coming out of the big bang as $1 \times 10^{-123}$. However, probability theorists say anything less than $1 \times 10^{-50}$ is impossible. (Source: Williams, p. 126. See Dig Deeper.)
- The Holy Spirit leads us to believe God’s creation account in Genesis 1 as true. Christians believe it by faith (Hebrews 11:3) because God said it in His true Holy Word, the Bible, which is without errors.
- Genesis 1 is a historical account, not a science textbook, myth, or poetry (as in creation imagery in Psalm 104:5–9). God’s creation shows a complex, finely tuned world, intricate physical bodies, and a vast universe (natural revelation). Based on God’s Word, we believe (conclude/trust) that God created the universe (special revelation).

Prayer

Creator God, thank You for creating a place of wonder and beauty for us to live in and for sustaining and caring for us every day.

Amen.
God Creates Adam and Eve
Genesis 1:26–2:25

This second creation account overlaps the big picture in Genesis 1, offering details about Day 6, when God created people in His image.

God made Adam from dust wet by a mist, or mud. Yatsar, the Hebrew word for “to be formed” is related to the word for “potter,” a person who shapes wet clay into useful items. The Lord breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and man became a living creature.

Not wanting Adam to be alone, God made a helper for him. He caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, took one of his ribs, and made a woman. The two became one flesh. The first woman came from man, but every person since has come from a woman.

What Is the Image of God?

The Hebrew word tselem, translated as “image,” means more than physical resemblance. God made people to reflect His character and virtues as His representatives in the world and stewards of the earth.

The first people reflected God’s qualities, such as perfection, sinlessness, creativity, and contentedness. They did not fear death because they ate from the tree of life. Most of all, God gave them the will and knowledge to please Him, which was lost when sin came into the world.

Since then, we can know the Lord only as the Spirit works through God’s Word and Sacraments to give us faith.

God’s image is being restored in Christians. As the Spirit works in us through God’s Word, we become more like Jesus, the image of God. On this side of heaven, we will always fight our sinful nature and won’t be fully remade into the image of Christ until we are perfectly renewed in the resurrection.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, work through Your Word and Sacraments to give us faith in Christ our Savior and renew Your image in us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
God filled the Garden of Eden with “every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Genesis 2:9); He planted two unusual trees in the center: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Both trees grew fruit, but the Bible does not say what kind.

Adam and Eve ate fruit from the tree of life and received its benefits. But the Lord said, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17).

At the invitation of the crafty serpent, Adam and Eve disobeyed the Lord, sinned, and ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As God said, they knew evil and eventually died. Sin and death resulted for all the people who lived after them.

To prevent Adam and Eve from eating from the tree of life and struggling with sin forever, God expelled them from the garden. He placed a cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way to this special tree.

But God did not leave His people without hope. He promised to send an offspring of Eve who would defeat the devil (Genesis 3:15). This is the first promise of the Messiah, who would save God’s people and set them free from sin and death.

Jesus is that promised Messiah. The cross where Jesus died became our tree of life. Through Jesus’ death on the cross, God grants us forgiveness of sin, new life, and salvation. “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Prayer
Jesus our Savior, give us faith to believe in You and trust You for all things, especially forgiveness of sin and eternal life, gifts we receive only from You. In Your name we pray. Amen.
Cain and Abel
Genesis 4:1–16

Cain and Abel’s conflict shows the original sibling rivalry, but it also shows the tragic result of sin in the world: murder and death. Since Adam and Eve sinned, all people are born in sin and all die.

Adam and Eve probably taught their children to worship God, but conflict began when Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord. Cain brought some of the harvest from his work as a farmer. Abel brought the firstborn from his flock. The offerings eventually became known as “firstfruits.”

The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but not for Cain. Hebrews 11:4 explains, “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.”

Cain became angry and took it out on his brother, killing him in a field. Still, God cared for Cain. Although He made Cain leave the family and wander the earth, God put a mark on him to protect him.

Sadly, Cain “went away from the presence of the Lord” (Genesis 4:16).

Thankfully, the Holy Spirit gives us life in God’s presence, the grace of Christ our Savior, and forgiveness of sins through His Word and Sacraments (Ephesians 2:18–22).

Firstfruit Offerings

Firstfruits refer to the first and best portion of the many gifts the Lord gives us. By offering firstfruits to the Lord, worshipers acknowledge that everything we have belongs to the Lord. He gives us His gifts to use and take care of. In thanks, we return the firstfruits to Him.

Yet, the gifts do not make offerings worthy in the eyes of the Lord. The Lord judges the heart of the person bringing the offering; the offering demonstrates the faith in God of the person who brings it.
Law/Gospel
God used water in a flood to drown sinful mankind. In Baptism, God uses water to drown my sins, granting me eternal life through His Son, Jesus.

Bible Words
In the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few . . . were brought safely through water. Baptism . . . now saves you . . . through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
1 Peter 3:20–21

Fun Facts
Made to float, not necessarily to sail, Noah’s ark had three decks, many rooms, a roof, and a door in one side. Made of gopher wood covered with pitch, it measured 300 × 50 × 30 cubits or 450 × 75 × 45 feet. (A cubit is about 18 inches, the length from the inside of the elbow to the wrist.) People probably wondered about the intentions of such a large, odd-looking creation.

Just Joking
Did you know Noah took money on the ark? Noah took a buck and doe, a duck with a bill, a frog with a green back, and a skunk with a scent.

Noah and the Flood
Genesis 6:1–9:17

Genesis 6 reports a distorted view of life that developed because of sin. God-believing sons of Adam’s tribe married women from Cain’s tribe, valuing physical attractiveness and strength over faith in God. This showed their children that physical aspects mattered most and gave the impression that faith was optional.

The Lord saw the resulting wickedness, evil intentions, corruption, and violence; it grieved His heart. Regretting He made humans, the Lord decided to wipe out all living creatures. Only Noah walked with the Lord (6:8–9).

By faith, Noah, his wife, three sons, and their wives built the ark as God said. Later, God brought animals and birds to the ark, to keep them alive and safe while God destroyed the world through the flood.

Seven days after they entered the ark, rain began to fall; it fell for forty days. In addition, “fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened” (7:11–12). Over twenty feet of water covered the highest mountains. Everything with the breath of life died except those in the ark. After forty days, the torrent stopped.

God sent wind to dry out the land, and the water subsided. After 150 days, the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat, but it took more than 100 more days to see the mountains. Just shy of a year after the flood started, Noah opened the door and saw dry ground. The next month, God told Noah to leave the ark with his family and animals.

With thanksgiving, Noah built an altar and sacrificed to the Lord. God promised to sustain the seasons and never again use a flood to destroy the earth. He made a covenant with Noah that included the rainbow as a sign of His promise.

Prayer
Lord God, Creator and Sustainer of life, keep us in Your grace in Christ our Savior today and forever. In His name we pray. Amen.
God plucked Abram and his family out of idolatry, calling them to follow Him spiritually and physically. Originally from Ur of the Chaldeans in ancient Babylonia, Abraham’s father Terah worshiped other gods (Joshua 24:2). Terah set out to move to the land of Canaan with his family. Instead, they settled in Haran, a town on the way.

From there, God called Abram to follow Him when Abram was seventy-five years old. The Lord led him to Canaan.

In Genesis 12:2–3, God made seven promises to Abram: “[1] I will make of you a great nation, [2] and I will bless you [3] and make your name great, [4] so that you will be a blessing. [5] I will bless those who bless you, [6] and him who dishonors you I will curse, and [7] in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Abram “believed the Lord, and He counted it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

God began to fulfill these promises during Abram’s life and ultimately fulfilled them in the Messiah, Jesus our Savior, first promised to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15).

God promised Abram he would become a great nation. Imagine what this meant to an old man with no children! Only God could make and keep this promise. God blessed Abram with the birth of a son; later, God’s Son, Jesus, was born from his family.

The name of Abram, our spiritual father, became great. He blessed many as he trusted God’s promises to bring the Savior into the world through him and his descendants. God blesses us all through Abram, because his descendant Jesus came to save us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:29).

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for keeping Your promises to Abram and to us, His children and Yours through Baptism into Your family. Amen.
Law/Gospel
I sin by doubting God’s Word and promises, thinking He cannot do what He says. As God’s child, I have nothing to fear because God is faithful and His Word is true. He has kept His promise to send His Son, Jesus, to be my Savior, and through Him, He gives me the joy of His salvation.

Bible Words
Is anything too hard for the Lord?
Genesis 18:14

Fun Fact
After leaving Abraham and Sarah, the two angels went to Sodom, where they rescued Abraham’s nephew Lot and his family before God destroyed that city with fire.

Connections
In the New Testament, scholars translate the Greek word Kyrios as “Lord.” From this Greek word we take the title of the Kyrie, a portion of the liturgy in which we say or sing, “Lord, have mercy upon us.”

Abraham’s Visitors from Heaven

Three visitors suddenly appeared to Abraham as he sat at his tent door in the heat of the day. The Bible identifies one visitor as “the Lord” (Yahweh) and the other two as angels (18:1; 19:1).

The visitors came to affirm God’s earlier promise to give Abraham and Sarah a son. The day of the earlier promise, ninety-nine-year-old Abram laughed at the prospect of his eighty-nine-year-old wife giving birth. This day, it was Sarah’s turn to laugh. The Lord reaffirmed His promise, even though Abraham and Sarah thought their age ruled them out.

Because of these reactions, the Lord told the couple to name their baby Isaac, which means “laughter.” They did so when their son was born the next year, a true miracle baby of people past their childbearing years.

"The Lord" in Flesh
In Scripture, the words "the Lord" refer to God. Because Hebrew and Greek use several different words to refer to "God," Bible translators use different English words as well. God’s name Yahweh (or YHWH), is shown as "the Lord" with small capitals instead of lowercase letters.

In God’s Old Testament appearances to His people, the writers use the words "the Lord" to identify God appearing as a human. This foreshadows the time when God sent His Son to earth, not just looking like a man, but born as a true man to live among His people.

In addition, context around the phrase “the angel of the Lord” sometimes refers to God Himself (e.g., Genesis 16:7–11; Genesis 22:11–12). Some Bible scholars believe that “the angel of the Lord” appearances were actually the Logos, the Word—Jesus Christ—appearing to God’s people in His godly state before He took on flesh as a baby in the womb of Mary.

Prayer
Christ our Lord, thank You for taking on flesh and becoming human. Thank You for paying for our sins by dying on the cross and giving new life by rising from the dead. Keep us in this new life You give and help us follow You every day. In Your name we pray. Amen.
Law/Gospel
God requires a payment for my sin. God sent His own Son, Jesus, to be sacrificed in payment for my sin.

Bible Words
For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

Connections
Altars occupy a central position in the sanctuary of churches today. An altar serves three purposes in Christian worship. (1) It reminds us that Jesus, the Lamb of God who died on the altar of the cross, is God's sacrifice to save us from our sins. (2) It symbolizes God's presence as the pastor and people offer prayers and praise to Him. (3) It serves as a table to celebrate and receive the Lord's Supper.

In the Lord's Supper, also called the Sacrament of the Altar, we receive Christ's body and blood with the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins.

We find the Lord and His gifts where His Word is preached and where we receive His Sacraments, Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Abraham and Isaac
Genesis 21:1–7; 22:1–19

As promised, God gave Abraham and Sarah a baby. Abraham was one hundred years old; Sarah was ninety. How they must have loved this son whom God had first promised to give them long ago!

God tested Abraham's love in a way He never asked of anyone else. The Lord commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering on a nearby mountain. Not questioning how God would keep His other promises to give many descendants through Isaac, Abraham trusted God.

Hebrews 11:17–19 explains, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”

Speaking this faith to Isaac, Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb” (Genesis 22:8). And so He did. After tying up Isaac, Abraham raised a knife to kill him, but the angel of the Lord called out, saying, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (22:12).

This event points to God's only Son coming to earth to be “the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). God gave up His only Son, Jesus, to atone for our sins on the cross and make us “at one” with God. Jesus died to set us free from sin. He rose from the dead to declare victory over death and the devil. In Jesus, God gives us “redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7)

Prayer
O Christ, the Lamb of God, have mercy on us. Give us Your peace. Amen.
A
fter Sarah died, Abraham did not want their son Issac to marry a local

girl, a likely idolater. When Isaac was forty years old, Abraham sent

his most trusted servant to their previous home to find a wife for Isaac.

With Abraham’s assurance that God would make his mission succeed,

the trusted one set out to find a wife from among Abraham’s relatives. In

faith, while standing by a well in Haran, the servant asked God to show him

the right woman by having her offer him a drink and also offer to water his

camels. Before he finished speaking, Rebekah approached the servant and

did these things.

Kind, hospitable, strong, hardworking, and friendly, Rebekah became

even more perfect when the servant realized she was related to Abraham.

She was the granddaughter of his brother Nahor.

Hearing the servant’s story and receiving the gifts Abraham sent,

her family and Rebekah herself consented to marry Issac without delay.

Rebekah probably never saw her family again, but she and Isaac built a

good life together.

From these people, as promised, God brought His only Son, Jesus, into

the world to become our Savior. Jesus gave Himself up for God’s family,
cleansing us by the waters of Holy Baptism and making us holy and without
blemish (Ephesians 5:25–27).

Marriage Customs

Most marriages in Bible times were arranged by parents. This time,

although Rebekah’s father and brother consented to her marriage, they also

asked if she agreed.

Rebekah took “her young women” (Genesis 24: 61), probably servants and her childhood nurse Deborah (35:8). Isaac loved her, and she comfort-
ed him after his mother’s death.

Prayer

Lord God, lead our family and show us how to serve You with joy.

In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
Scripture reports that the contentious relationship of Rebekah and Isaac’s twins began in the womb. Esau was born first, but Jacob grasped his heel and was born soon after.

Common ground was hard to find. Esau became a skillful hunter who enjoyed being outdoors. Jacob, a quiet man, preferred staying close to home. Esau became Isaac’s favorite, while Rebekah favored Jacob.

A pot of lentil stew showed their ongoing conflict. Arriving home hungry and exhausted, Esau asked Jacob for some stew he had made. Jacob agreed, but only if Esau sold him his birthright, which included the firstborn’s right to a double inheritance, family leadership, and the blessing to carry God’s covenant promises.

Can you imagine selling such a valuable gift for a bowl of soup? Esau did. His actions show careless disrespect for his family and God’s covenant.

Later, Rebekah and Jacob conspired to steal the firstborn blessing Isaac intended for Esau. Esau wept when he discovered their treachery. He received a lesser blessing and hated his brother Jacob. Rebekah talked Isaac into sending Jacob to her brother Laban’s house in Haran.

This account demonstrates that people in the Bible struggled with sin and its destruction just as we do. Yet, from this family of sinners, God brought His Son, Jesus, into the world to save us from sin’s devastation.

Paying for our sins through His death on the cross, Jesus reconnects us to our loving and merciful heavenly Father. God offers forgiveness of sin and eternal life to all who believe in Jesus our Savior.

Prayer

Lord God, keep us in the one true faith in Christ our Savior, and empower us to trust You to bring good from everything that happens in our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
The Lord God cares for His children even when we experience the consequences of sin, as we see in this account about Jacob. Escaping the ire of Esau, his twin, Jacob traveled to Haran to take shelter in the home of his mother’s brother Laban.

Stopping to sleep, God appeared to Jacob in a dream. Jacob saw a ladder set up on earth with its top in heaven. Angels ascended and descended on the ladder.

At the top of the ladder, the Lord Himself appeared and reaffirmed the promises first made to Abraham: He will give the land of Canaan to Jacob and his offspring and bless all the families of earth through Jacob’s offspring. God also promised to watch over Jacob and bring him back home to this land.

When he woke, Jacob felt awestruck. He marked the place with a pillar and called it Bethel, which means “house of God.” With thankfulness, He vowed to trust the Lord as His God and rely on Him to care for him.

Jesus referenced Jacob’s dream when speaking to Nathanael. He said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:51).

The ladder in Jacob’s dream showed a bridge between heaven and earth. Jesus, as true God and true man, is the bridge between God and humankind. By His suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus reconnected sinners to God. He provides eternal blessings for all who trust in Him.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, be with us wherever we go. Help us keep our eyes on You, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before You endured the cross. In Your name we pray. Amen (Hebrews 12:2).
God kept Jacob in His grace and continued to bless him. Jacob safely arrived at his Uncle Laban’s house, where he quickly fell in love with Laban’s daughter Rachel.

Jacob agreed to work for Laban for seven years as a bride-price for Rachel. Jacob prospered and so did Laban. When the wedding day arrived, however, Laban tricked Jacob and married him to his older daughter Leah. Incensed, Jacob confronted Laban, who said it was customary for the older daughter to marry first. Laban agreed to give Rachel to Jacob as a wife in a week if he worked another seven years for her bride-price.

And so began a twisted tale of sister rivalry that resulted in at least thirteen children. When the sisters could not conceive, they gave their maids to Jacob to have children in their names. The result? Twelve sons and a daughter named Dinah.

As Jacob had vowed, he trusted the Lord, and God surely blessed him and his work. Jacob prospered. Both he and Laban became rich men. Twenty years passed before Jacob decided to go home to his family in Canaan.

Through these children, God grew Jacob’s family into a large nation. Through this family of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, God brought His Son, Jesus, into the world.

“In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:26–29).

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank You for making us members of Your family through Baptism and faith so that we may be heirs of all the promises you made to Abraham. In Your name we pray. Amen.
A
fter twenty years, Jacob came home, bringing his wives, children, servants, and animals.

Jacob sent messengers to Esau, hoping to find favor with his brother. When the messengers returned with word that Esau and four hundred men were coming to meet them, Jacob felt very afraid. He turned to the Lord in prayer, asking Him to remember His covenant with His people and spare Jacob and his family from Esau’s fury.

Jacob sent gifts of sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys for Esau ahead of his family, hoping to appease him. How surprised Jacob must have been when Esau ran to meet him, hugged and kissed him, and welcomed him home. Both brothers wept. What a welcome! What a joyful reunion!

Esau refused the gifts Jacob offered, saying he had enough. But Jacob insisted, saying, “If I have found favor in your sight, accept these presents. Seeing your face is like seeing the face of God, and you accepted me.” Although the Bible does not record Esau’s words of forgiveness, his actions show that he forgave Jacob. What a remarkable outcome for the brothers!

Perhaps you have experienced conflicts with friends or family members and struggle with forgiving others. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus taught us to ask God to forgive us. Forgiveness is a gift God gives us in His mercy and because of Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross for sinners. And the Bible says we should forgive others as the Lord forgives us (Colossians 3:13).

If you struggle with forgiving others, ask the Lord to change your attitude, give you gratitude for His forgiveness, and give you the ability to forgive. Jesus promised that God will always give these kinds of good gifts of the Holy Spirit to us (Luke 11:13).

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for forgiving our sins by Your grace. Fill us with kindness and the ability to forgive others as You forgive us, freely and with great joy. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Law/Gospel
Broken families and failed friendships are the result of sin. Jesus’ forgiveness restores my broken relationship with God and can heal my broken earthly relationships as well.

Bible Words
Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

From the Catechism
In the Fifth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, we pray, “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

What does this mean? We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

Luther’s Small Catechism, Part 3, The Lord’s Prayer

Esau Forgives Jacob
Genesis 31:3; 32–33

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