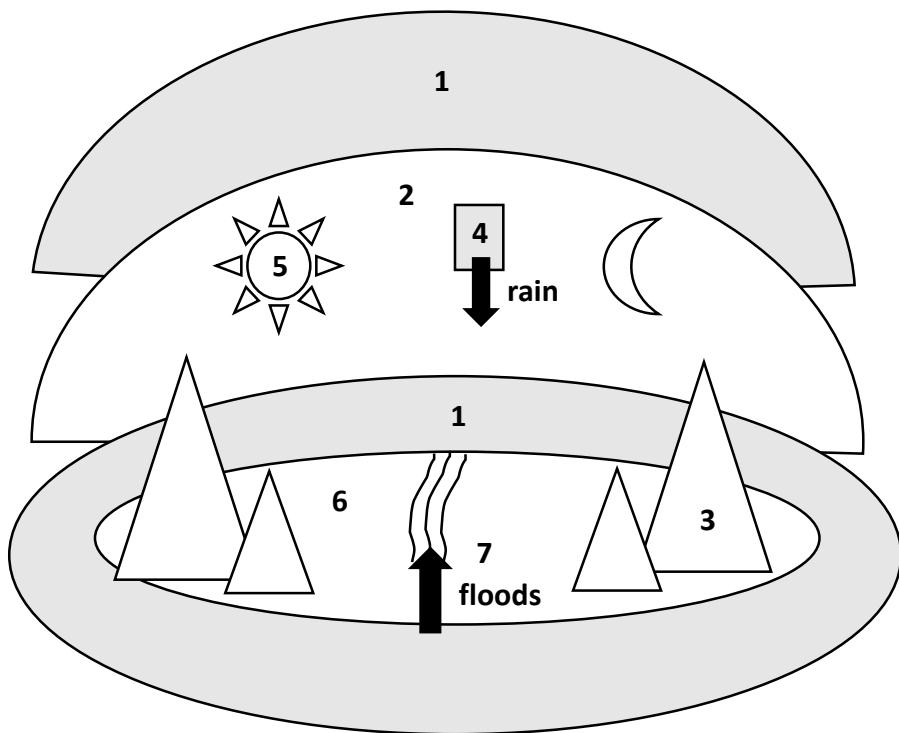


Hebrew Cosmology and the Genesis Creation Account

The Genesis account of creation presupposes a Hebrew *cosmology*, their understanding of the ways the world physically functions and how humanity interacts with it. Their understanding was radically different from our modern viewpoint on the world (which is influenced via science). The ancient writers had little interest in the material composition of the cosmos or the formational history of the world. Instead they focused on the functional reality; that is, how people universally experienced the world. In a pre-science age, weather events such as floods, hail, and lightning represented forces of chaos brought down upon the people. By affirming that God had control over these forces and created the world just right (“It was good”), Genesis affirms that God is in control despite these threats against their survival.



In Hebrew cosmology, the universe consisted of two bodies of water **(1)**, divided by an “expanse” **(2)** – in Hebrew *raqia*. Water, in the thought of the Hebrews and other cultures, represented “chaos,” forces beyond their personal control. Other cultures deified these forces, naming the sun, moon, rain, and wind as gods, while also positing additional gods in seas themselves. Genesis contrasts with these other accounts of creation in presenting God as ruling over the waters (and therefore chaos), directing them where to go and how to function for the benefit of the world.

The expanse **(2)** was a solid dome which nothing was able to pass through (cf. Eze. 1). This view was held universally by all cultures until 200 CE (and with some after that!). The expanse was held up by the mountains of the world **(3)**. This “vault” separated the two bodies of water, allowing water through “windows,” “doors,” or “channels” **(4)** (cf. Gen. 7:11) from the water above (aka rain). The sun, the moon, and the stars **(5)** were fixed in this object, functioning as a way to keep track of the seasons and religious festivals (cf. Gen 1:14).

The land **(6)** was envisioned as disk that sat upon the lower limitless body of water **(1)**. There was only one large connected body of land. The water below the land (in Hebrew – ‘*ed*) would flow as lakes and rivers and overflow **(7)** during the seasons for growing crops as regulated by God (cf. Gen. 2:6).

The Genesis Creation Account

Day	Verse	Action	Function	Comment	Day	Verse	Action	Act As a Functionary By	Comment
1	1:3 - 5	<i>Speaks:</i> “light” (day) and “darkness” (night)	Sets up time	The focus is not on “how” or “what” created on Day 1, but rather on moving from a chaotic, non-functional situation to order as ordained by God	4	1:14 - 17	<i>Speaks:</i> “lights” set in the expanse; great light (sun) & lesser light (moon)	“Signs” convey knowledge about God; identifies time of religious festivals; establishes calendar	Passage uses “lights” b/c “sun” & “moon” were named deities; believed God uses celestial bodies for specific purposes (not mechanical only)
2	1:6 - 8	<i>Speaks:</i> an “expanse” separates 2 bodies of water	Sets up weather	The expanse is the “storehouse” (Job 38:22, Ps. 135:7) for weather. It regulates the rain from the waters above and thus constrains the chaos as well	5	1:20 - 21	<i>Speaks:</i> living creatures of the water and birds; blessing to multiply	Populate the expanse and the waters	Sea creatures referred to as <i>tannin</i> – sea monsters who represented deified chaos; Genesis puts them as only created beings, not gods
3	1:9 - 12	<i>Speaks:</i> water gathered into one area; dry land appears; earth sprouts seed-bearing fruits & trees	Sets up agriculture	Notice that God doesn’t “create” or “manufacture” anything on the 3 rd day; the focus on organization of the cosmos, specifically the continuous nature of agriculture, is clear	6	1:24 - 27	<i>Speaks:</i> domesticated animals, wild herd animals that serve as prey, wild predators, and man; blessing to multiply, subdue, rule	Populate the land	The blessing serves as a foundation for the message of Genesis: God is working to create a covenant people in the world he created; instructions are not license but privileges and obligations
7	2:2 - 3	<i>Ceases and “rests”:</i> blesses & declares 7 th day “holy”	Gives God a place to “rest” (the created cosmos) which is blessed with favor	“Rest” refers to the divine symbol of God’s control over creation – cosmos is his “temple” and serves as his “footstool” (Isa. 66:1)	<i>Modern readers are at a disadvantage when interpreting Genesis because the inherent assumptions of our culture are so different from when it was written. Instead of the “How” or “What” of the account, we need to focus on the “Why” of story. Its meaning is revealed through the cosmic functions established on the creation days, not a scientific description of the event.</i>				