

# The First Creation Story

## בראשית, סדר א\*

בראשית א:א - ב:ג, \*ועוד תחילת ב:ד

## Genesis, Seder 1\*

Genesis 1:1-2:3, \*plus the beginning of 2:4

<sup>1</sup>בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:  
<sup>2</sup>וְהָאָרֶץ הִיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם  
וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְדַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: <sup>3</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר  
אֱלֹהִים יְהי אוֹר וַיְהי־אוֹר: <sup>4</sup>וַיֹּרֶא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־  
הָאוֹר כִּי־טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין  
הַחֹשֶׁךְ: <sup>5</sup>וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַאֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא  
לַיְלָה וַיְהי־עֶרֶב וַיְהי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning of God creating the heavens and the earth, [when]  
<sup>2</sup>the earth was vacant and void, and darkness was over the face of the  
deep, and the spirit of God was over the face of the water, <sup>3</sup>God said  
“Let there be light” – and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw the light, that  
it was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>And God  
called the light “day,” and the darkness He called “night” – and there  
was evening, and there was morning: one day.

<sup>6</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי רֻקִּיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהי  
מַבְדֵּיל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם: <sup>7</sup>וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָרֻקִּיעַ  
וַיַּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לָרֻקִּיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם  
אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לָרֻקִּיעַ וַיְהי־כֵן: <sup>8</sup>וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים  
לָרֻקִּיעַ שָׁמַיִם וַיְהי־עֶרֶב וַיְהי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי:

<sup>6</sup>And God said “Let there be a surface in the midst of the water, and  
let it separate water from water.” <sup>7</sup>And God made the surface and it  
separated the water under the surface from the water above the  
surface, and it was so. <sup>8</sup>And God called the surface “sky” – and there  
was evening, and there was morning: day two.

<sup>9</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקְוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם  
אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד וַתֵּרָאָה הַיַּבֵּשָׁה וַיְהי־כֵן: <sup>10</sup>וַיִּקְרָא  
אֱלֹהִים לַיַּבֵּשָׁה אָרֶץ וְלַמָּקוֹהַ הַמַּיִם קָרָא יָמִים  
וַיֹּרֶא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב: <sup>11</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תִּדְשָׂא  
הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזֵּרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֵץ פְּרִי

<sup>9</sup>And God said “Let the water below the sky be gathered to one place,  
and dryness appear,” and it was so. <sup>10</sup>And God called the dryness the  
“earth,” and the gathering of water He called the “seas,” and God saw  
that it was good. <sup>11</sup>And God said “Let the earth sprout sprout[s]:  
plant[s] bearing seed [and] fruit tree[s] making fruit of every kind on

1 Treating “ברא *bara*” (“created”) as the verbal noun “בָּרָא *b’ro*” (“creating”) follows Rashi and most modern Jewish translators. This solves the grammatical problem of “רֵאשִׁית *reshit*” (“the beginning of”) requiring a noun after it, but requires ignoring the vowels and accent markings of the Masoretes. The initial “בִּ” (“in” or “when”) is carried over to the next verse to make the structure clearer in English.

2 While the first word of the rhyming Hebrew phrase “תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ *tohu vavohu*” is known to mean “void,” the latter is only ever used in the *Tanakh* as part of this phrase and appears etymologically unconnected to any other words. Following Robert Alter, the latter therefore ought to be translated as a similar word which rhymes – or this case, is alliterative: “vacant.”

The Hebrew word “רוּחַ *ruah*” can mean either “wind” or “spirit,” but usually means the latter when used in a phrase like “spirit of God (רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים *ruah Elohim*).” In this primordial imagery, it is perhaps meant to evoke both meanings.

6-8 In Hebrew, “sky (שָׁמַיִם *shamayim*)” is only one letter away from “water (מַיִם *mayim*).” Note that this word can also refer to the broader concept of everything above the earth, translated as “heavens” when it has this connotation.

לְמִינֵוֹ אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוּבוֹ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי׃<sup>12</sup> וַתֵּצֵא  
הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׁא עֵשֶׂב מְזִרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ  
עֹשֶׂה־פְרִי אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוּבוֹ לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים  
בִּיְטוֹב׃<sup>13</sup> וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי׃

earth that has seeds in it,” and it was so.<sup>12</sup> And the earth brought out  
sprouts: plant[s] bearing seed of every kind and tree[s] making fruit  
that has seeds in it of every kind – and God saw that it was good.  
<sup>13</sup> And there was evening, and there was morning: day three.

<sup>14</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֶת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם  
לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה וְהָיוּ לְאֹתוֹת  
וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וְלַיָּמִים וּשְׁנִים׃<sup>15</sup> וְהָיוּ לְמְאֹרֶת בְּרָקִיעַ  
הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם רִבְעִי׃<sup>16</sup> וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים  
אֶת־שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֶת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת־הַמָּאֹר הַגָּדֹל  
לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־הַמָּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת  
הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים׃<sup>17</sup> וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בְּרָקִיעַ  
הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃<sup>18</sup> וְלַמָּשָׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה  
וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים  
בִּיְטוֹב׃<sup>19</sup> וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם רִבְעִי׃

<sup>14</sup> And God said “Let there be lights on the surface of the sky to  
separate the day from the night – they will serve as signs for  
festivals, days, and years,<sup>15</sup> and they will serve to light up the earth  
as lights on the surface of the sky,” and it was so.<sup>16</sup> God made the  
two great lights, the big light to rule the day and the small light to  
rule the night, and the stars.<sup>17</sup> And God put them on the surface of  
the sky to light up the earth,<sup>18</sup> to rule in the day and in the night,  
and to separate the light from the darkness, and God saw that it  
was good.<sup>19</sup> And there was evening, and there was morning: day  
four.

<sup>20</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שָׂרָץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה וְעוֹף  
יְעוֹפֵף עַל־הָאָרֶץ עַל־פְּנֵי רִקִּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם׃<sup>21</sup> וַיַּבְרָא  
אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַתַּנִּינִם הַגְּדֹלִים וְאֵת כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ  
הַחַיָּה הַרֹמֶשֶׂת אֲשֶׁר שָׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵהֶם  
וְאֵת כָּל־עוֹף כָּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים בִּיְטוֹב׃  
<sup>22</sup> וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ  
אֶת־הַמַּיִם בַּיָּמִים וְהָעוֹף יֵרֵב בָּאָרֶץ׃<sup>23</sup> וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב  
וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם חֲמִישִׁי׃

<sup>20</sup> And God said “Let the water swarm [with] a swarm of living  
being[s], and let fowl fly over the earth – over the face of the surface  
of the sky.”<sup>21</sup> And God created the great sea-serpents, and every kind of  
crawling living being that the water swarmed [with], and every kind  
of winged bird, and God saw that it was good.<sup>22</sup> And God blessed  
them, saying “Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the water in the seas! And  
let the birds multiply on the earth.”<sup>23</sup> And there was evening, and  
there was morning: day five.

<sup>24</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תֵּצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ  
בַּהֶמָּה וְרֶמֶשׂ וְחַיֵּי־הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁשִׁי׃<sup>25</sup> וַיַּעַשׂ  
אֱלֹהִים אֶת־חַיֵּי הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת־הַבְּהֵמָה  
לְמִינָהּ וְאֵת כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינָהּ וַיֵּרָא  
אֱלֹהִים בִּיְטוֹב׃<sup>26</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם  
בְּצִלְמֵנוּ וְיִדְמוּ אֵלֵינוּ׃

<sup>24</sup> And God said “Let the earth bring out every kind of living being:  
cattle, and crawling-things, and every kind of wild beast,” and it was  
so.<sup>25</sup> And God made every kind of wild beast, and every kind of cattle,  
and all of every kind of crawling-thing of the soil, and God saw that it  
was good.<sup>26</sup> And God said “Let us make humans in our image, by our

20 The Hebrew word “עוֹף” *of* is translated here as “fowl” to make its etymological link to “יְעוֹפֵף” (*y’ofef*) (“let fly”) clear, but will otherwise be translated simply as “bird.”

24 Here and elsewhere, “wild beast” (חַיֵּי הָאָרֶץ *hayat ha’aretz*) is an expression which literally is “creature of the earth.”

בְּצִלְמֵנוּ כְּדִמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרֵדוּ בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף  
הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ  
הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

27 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצִלְמוֹ  
בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ  
זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

28 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ  
וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּבְשֵׁשׁ וַיְרֵדוּ בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם  
וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל-חַיַּה הָרֹמֶשֶׂת עַל-הָאָרֶץ:  
29 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת-כָּל-עֵשֶׂב  
זֶרַע זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעֵץ  
אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ פְרִיעֵץ זֶרַע זֶרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ:  
30 וְלֹכְלֵל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְלֹכְלֵעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹכְלֵ  
רֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֶת-כָּל-יִרְקָה  
עֵשֶׂב לְאֹכְלָהּ וַיְהִי-כֵן: 31 וַיֹּרֶא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-  
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר  
יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי:

2:1 וַיִּכְלֹ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-עַבְבָּאֵם: 2 וַיִּכְלֵ אֱלֹהִים  
בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם  
הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: 3 וַיְבָרֶךְ  
אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת  
מִכָּל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת: 4 אֵלֶּה  
תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם

likeness, and they will reign over the fish of the sea, the bird[s] of the sky, the cattle, and all the earth and all the crawling-things crawling on the earth.”

27 And so God created humans in His image,  
in the image of God He created them,  
male and female He created them.

28 And God blessed them, and God said to them: “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and master it, and reign over the fish of the sea, the bird[s] of the sky, and all the crawling-things crawling on the earth!” 29 And God said: “Look: I gave to you every plant bearing seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree that has fruit bearing seed – they will serve as food for you – 30 and to all the beasts of the earth, to all the birds of the sky, and to all the crawling-things on the earth that have the breath of life within them, every green plant for food,” and it was so. 31 And God saw all that He made – and look! – it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning: the sixth day.

2:1 And so the heavens and the earth and all their multitudes were completed. 2 God completed on the seventh day His task that He did, and He rested on the seventh day from all His task that He did. 3 And God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy, for on it God rested from all His task that He created to do. 4 This is the story of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

27 Following Robert Alter, this verse is formatted as poetry.

2:1-4 The Christian division of the Bible into chapters misses the fact that these lines from Chapter 2 are part of the narrative of Chapter 1. The first three verses are correctly grouped with the prior narrative in the Jewish systems of סדרים *s'darim* and פרשיות *parashiyot*, but the division into verses common to all of them misses the fact that the first half of verse 2:4 is almost certainly the concluding line of this story.

4 The English word “story” captures the idiomatic essence of the Hebrew word תולדות *toldot*, which literally means “begettings.”