

Humans before plants?

Why Genesis does not contradict itself



Michael Thompson

IN 2020, a prominent Australian Bible college lecturer said that Genesis 1 and 2 give a different order for when things were created. In Genesis 2, “Humans are made before plants, whereas in chapter 1, humans were made last of all.”¹ He says this difference in order, along with the different names for God is the basis for the claim that Genesis 1 and 2 were written by different authors.

He explained that this was one of the justifications for the Documentary Hypothesis (p. 20). This is the idea that Moses did not write Genesis, or any of the Pentateuch or Torah, the first five books of the Bible. Rather, Genesis and the other books of Moses were written by multiple independent authors.

It is no surprise that this idea of ‘different creation accounts’ is welcomed by proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis. Their whole theory assumes the Genesis narrative and Pentateuch was written by multiple authors hundreds of years apart, and full of supposed corrections and updates. Having contradictory creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 is just what they would expect to see. But are these accounts actually contradictory?

Different order of events between Genesis 1 & 2?

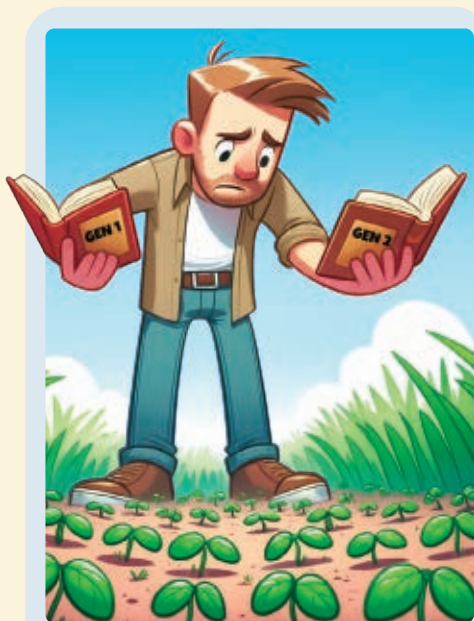
Many Bible college lecturers critique the Documentary Hypothesis, pointing out its many flaws.¹ This includes the lecturer cited here.¹ But unfortunately, like too many others, he still teaches that there are separate, contradictory creation accounts. This ‘middle ground’ teaching of Genesis is

becoming more common in Bible colleges and causes people to disbelieve the text. This is unfortunate but perhaps not surprising, given the perceived pressure to allow room for millions of years and even evolution.

So, is there a contradiction between Genesis 1 and 2?

In Genesis 1, plants are made on Day 3 (1:11–13) and humans on Day 6 (1:26–31). Genesis 2 says that God made man from dust (2:7) at a time when “no bush of the field” had sprung up (2:5). While this might seem like man was formed before the plants, this isn’t the case. The key here is “of the field”.²

Genesis 1 refers to all types of plants, broadly described as “vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees” (1:11). Genesis 2 refers to a subset of plants, namely “bush of the field” and “small plant of the field”.



Are there two contradictory Genesis creation accounts?

Michael Thompson | Microsoft Co-Pilot

These specifically required “rain on the land” and “man to work the ground” (2:5).

Many of the plants in Day 3 were “brought forth” (1:12), likely meaning that God miraculously grew them to mature size—for example, the fruit trees ready for Adam and Eve to pick fruit on Day 6. But some of these plants—those of the field—were still sprouting and required cultivation by Adam and Eve once they sprouted. Because it was before the Fall, this cultivation “to work the ground” (2:5) would not have been burdensome toil involving sorrow and suffering (3:17). It was part of God’s plan to provide Adam and Eve good work to do (2:15). So, plants were created before humans as in Genesis 1, with no contradiction in Genesis 2.

Something else to consider is what Jesus, the Creator Himself, said. To teach about marriage, Jesus quoted from both Genesis 1 and 2 in the same breath, with no indication that they are two different or contradictory creation accounts.^{3,4}

“He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female [from Genesis 1:27], and said, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? [Then from Genesis 2:24] So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate”’ (Matthew 19:4–6).

Additionally, one of the strongest reasons why Genesis 1 and 2 are not separate creation accounts is the *toledot* of 2:4, which is translated “these are the generations”. The *toledot* links the two chapters together, forming a chiasmic structure. In this literary structure the ideas or themes are presented in a specific symmetric pattern, forming the shape of the Greek letter *chi* (X).

The chiasmic structure of Genesis 2:4 (which is deconstructed in Table 1) shows the reader of Genesis that the first part of the verse is an *overview* of creation (Gen 1:1–2:3, order is ABC, ‘heavens’ mentioned first—big picture view). The second part that follows simply zooms in on *details* (Genesis 2:5–25, order is C*B*A*, ‘earth’ first—zoom-in view). This structure, an *overview* followed by *details*, is a common literary structure among Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) creation accounts, known as *recapitulation*.⁵

When ancient Israelites heard and read this chiasmic linking passage in 2:4, it would have been clear to them that creation is described as a single account. It begins with an *overview* first (Genesis 1:1–2:3), followed by a more *detailed* description (2:5–25).

Different names for God

The other reasoning the lecturer used to support two separate creation accounts is that different names for the Creator God were used in each. Genesis 1:1–2:3 uses only Elohim (God), and 2:5–25 uses only Yahweh (Lord).¹ But the linking passage, the *toledot* of 2:4, serves to undermine this argument. It combines those terms together as “Lord God” (Yahweh Elohim) to show a transition between ways of describing our Creator according to context. The change of terms emphasizes the transition from



Image: Sara Speranza

Man created before birds and beasts?

Another argument sometimes made to support the idea of ‘two separate creation accounts’ is that Genesis 1 has the birds and animals created before man, whereas Genesis 2 seems to have the order reversed. The King James translation, for example, says (emphasis added):

“And out of the ground the Lord God **formed** every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them:” (Genesis 2:19a)

‘Formed’ is a legitimate translation of the Hebrew *yāṣar* יָצַר. However, context is crucial to deciding the best translation.¹ Genesis 1 has already given us the relevant context, by telling us that the birds were created first (Day 5), then beasts and humans (Day 6). Thus, many modern translations use the *past perfect* (aka *pluperfect*) for greater accuracy. E.g., the ESV (emphasis added):

“Now out of the ground the Lord God **had formed** every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.”

The scholars who acknowledge this translation of *yāṣar* as appropriate include some prominent ones who do not defend Genesis as a straightforward historical account.²

Summary

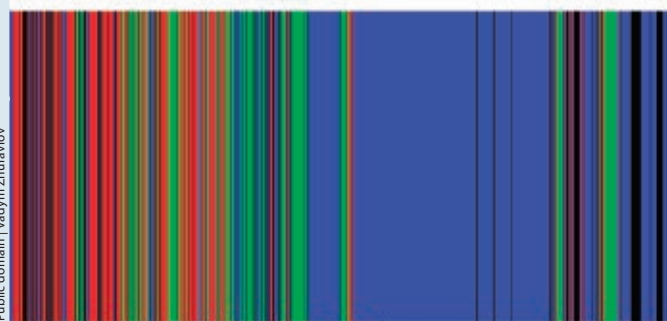
Genesis 2:19 simply describes creatures being brought to Adam that were formed sometime beforehand. Other than indicating that their creation was from the ground, it says nothing about its specific order or timing. There was no need to, because it was already clearly stated in Genesis 1.

1. Sarfati, J., *The Genesis Account*, CBP, pp. 323–325, 2023; creation.com/store/10-2-606.
2. Collins, J.C., The wayyiqtol as ‘pluperfect’: when and why, *Tyndale Bulletin* 46(1):117–140, 1995.

Table 1. Chiasmic structure of Genesis 2:4

These are the generations of	
A	the heavens and
B	the earth
C	when they were created
C*	in the day that the LORD God (Yahweh Elohim) made
B*	the earth
A*	and the heavens. ⁵

Yahwist (J) ■ ■ Priestly (P)
Elohist (E) ■ ■ Redactor (R)



Documentary Hypothesis

These chart colours (red, blue, green, and black) show supposed segmented authorship of the first four books of the Torah, illustrating one of many variants of the Documentary Hypothesis. For example, according to this chart structure proposed by R.E. Friedman (1997), Leviticus was mostly written by the Priestly author with some modification by the Redactor (supposedly a later editor). And Genesis was supposedly an evolving document with additions and changes from several authors.

The Documentary Hypothesis was widely promoted by Julius Wellhausen in the late 1800s. It is still unfortunately a common view among secular, liberal, and even evangelical scholars of the Bible. See creation.com/documentary. Other variants include a 'D' (Deuteronomist) contribution—supposedly virtually all of Deuteronomy. This diagram visually highlights the absurdity of proposing such a motley cut-and-paste by a clearly overworked redactor (editor).

the *overview* context of creation (Creator God) to the zoomed-in *details* context of creation (personal/covenantal Lord).⁵

Conclusion

Yes, there are some differences in the way Genesis 1 is written compared to Genesis 2, but there are no contradictions. The key is to understand the phrase “of the field” and the linking passage, the *toledot* of 2:4. Genesis 1 is a summary outline of creation; Genesis 2 zooms in on the details of humans and God.⁶ There is no support in the biblical text that the Bible contains two separate, contradictory creation accounts written by two different authors.

References and notes

1. Judd, A., The Documentary Hypothesis explained: Wellhausen and the formation of the Pentateuch, youtu.be/KFp8n5tqsRU? 3 Apr 2020 (1:56–2:05). This video aims to explain and critique the Documentary Hypothesis. But unfortunately, it incorrectly claims contradictions between Genesis 1 and 2.
2. Sarfati, J., *The Genesis Account*, CBP, pp. 295–296, 2023; creation.com/store/10-2-606. See also Kruger, M., An Understanding of Genesis 2:5, *J. Creation* 11(1):106–110, 1997; creation.com/gen2_5.
3. Sarfati, J., Christ the Creationist, *Creation* 37(4):6, 2015; creation.com/christ-the-creationist.
4. Batten, D., Genesis contradictions? *Creation* 18(4):44–45, 1996; creation.com/genesis-contradictions (updated 2023).
5. Sarfati, ref. 2, pp. 13, 26–28, 292–294. Also Genesis—its author and structure, *Creation* 45(4):24–26, 2023; creation.com/genesis-author.
6. Sarfati, J., Differences between Genesis 1 and 2? Is it OK to eat rare steak? creation.com/genesis-1-2-steak, 29 Oct 2016.

MICHAEL THOMPSON B.E.(Hons), Ph.D.

Dr Thompson is a speaker/scientist for CMI—Australia in Brisbane. He has a Ph.D. in coastal engineering and specialized in the application of artificial intelligence for measuring coastal processes. For more: creation.com/michael-thompson.

A faith booster

Isn't it wonderful when you feel your faith getting a boost? *Creation* magazine has done just this for countless Christians around the globe—helping them avoid or overcome faith ‘wobbles’ in the face of the onslaughts of our secular culture and its teachings.

Lock in a regular faith-boost for years to come.
Renew your subscription or subscribe
for yourself or a friend!



creation.com/magazine



Creation 48(3) 2026