

Genesis 1:14-2:3      “God Filled the Heavens and the Earth”      February 15, 2009  
Psalm 29  
Hebrews 3:7-4:13

The way that Hebrews uses the creation narrative should make us think.  
Hebrews 4:4 says that on the seventh day God entered his rest.  
And Hebrews 4 also says that man was supposed to enter God’s rest.

God’s work of creation was finished from the foundation of the world.  
And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.

God takes the barrenness and emptiness (the *tohu vbohu*) of the deep  
and makes it a verdant and fruitful land, fit for animal and human habitation.  
And he calls man to live in fellowship with him,  
and walk in faithful obedience to his word.

Genesis 1-3 is all about how God called man to enter his rest,  
but man did not – and instead man was sent out into the land of dust and death.

The rest of the book of Genesis has the same theme.  
Now, because of sin, the ‘*tohu vbohu*’ has returned!  
Barrenness and emptiness – famine and childlessness plague the rest of Genesis.  
But God promises to give his people a fruitful land,  
a land flowing with milk and honey.  
Even here in the creation narrative you have foreshadowings of redemption.

There was no sin – no death – no evil – prior to the creation.  
There was nothing.  
There was “*tohu vbohu*” – barrenness and emptiness.

So Genesis 1 moves us from “*tohu vbohu*” to fructifying and multiplying –  
but so does all of Genesis.

And for that matter, the whole Pentateuch – the five books of Moses –  
follows this theme.

What is the Exodus all about?  
God takes his people out of the *tohu vbohu* of Egypt –  
the barren wasteland of dust and death –  
and bringing them into a fruitful land of life and blessing.  
And just as he called Adam to live in faithful obedience to his word,  
so also he will call Israel.

Deuteronomy 8 says that the promised land is a fruitful land, lacking nothing.  
It is like the garden of Eden.  
And Deuteronomy 32 refers to Egypt as the “*tohu*” land –

the howling wilderness –  
from which God rescued his people.

Indeed, in one sense, when Israel entered the Promised Land, they “entered their rest.”  
The story of the Pentateuch is the story of how Adam failed to enter God’s rest,  
but God brought Israel out of the *tohu vbohu* of Egypt  
and through Joshua gave them rest.  
Through Joshua – whose name in Greek is Jesus –  
Israel enters God’s rest!

But Hebrews points out that this narrative is incomplete.  
*For if Joshua had given them rest,  
God would not have spoken of another day later on.*

Israel was brought into the promised land –  
but Deuteronomy also warns that if they rebel against the LORD,  
then God will turn Israel into a land of dust and death,  
and all the plagues of Egypt will come upon Israel.

And in fact, that is precisely what happened.  
When Babylon comes against Jerusalem,  
Jeremiah says that Jerusalem and Judah will be returned to *tohu vbohu*.  
(Jeremiah 4:23-26)

So not only does the whole Pentateuch follow the pattern of Genesis 1,  
but the whole of Scripture!  
That’s why we read Revelation 21 last week.  
What God does in Genesis 1 – taking the *tohu vbohu*  
and bringing order and fruitfulness out of the barren emptiness –  
is exactly what God does in redemption.  
And he does it the same way.

By his Word.

That’s why we sang Psalm 29.  
The voice of the LORD brought forth the heavens and the earth.  
And the voice of the LORD brought redemption to his people.  
Because the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And because the Word has become flesh,  
we are now called to enter God’s rest.  
Hebrews 4 is clear that we have not yet entered that rest.  
*Whoever has entered God’s rest  
has also rested from his works as God did from his.*

Hebrews reminds us that God entered his rest on the seventh day.

And we are called to enter God's rest –  
therefore a Sabbath rest remains for the people of God.  
Christ has entered God's rest on the first day of the new creation,  
and so therefore our entrance into God's rest is assured –  
so long as we continue to believe in him,  
love and serve him,  
and above all, worship him!

As we go through God's work of creation in these six days,  
we need to remember what this narrative is doing.

It is establishing the pattern of life for the people of God:

Six days shall you do all your labor, but on the seventh you shall rest.

And there is a parallel between the first three days and the second three days.

In the first three days God creates the three realms:  
the heavens, the earth, and the seas.

Days one and two each have one creative act.

Day three has two creative acts.

Today we will hear about the filling of the three realms:

Days four and five will each have one creative act.

Day six will have two creative acts.

## **I. The Creation of the Realms: the Heavens, the Seas, and the Earth**

### **1. Let There Be Light (1:3-5)**

### **2. Let There Be a Firmament (1:6-8)**

### **3. Let the Dry Land Appear and Let the Earth Sprout (1:9-13)**

Last week I suggested that we should read Genesis with an ancient picture of the world,  
rather than the modern scientific view.

Don't think in terms of planets, outer space, and all that.

Let the text drive the picture –

and remember that the people writing and reading this text  
had an ancient perspective on the world.

They believed that the world was flat – and that it had a solid dome over it  
that held back the cosmic sea.

And nothing in Genesis 1 (or the rest of scripture) suggests anything different.

There is nothing ambiguous or confusing in this.

It would have been perfectly clear to those who heard it

(and early Jewish and Christian commentators demonstrate this).

On the first three days, God created the realms of the heavens, the earth, and the seas.

1) on the first day God created light – not the heavenly bodies –

- not the sun, moon, and stars –  
but “light”
- 2) on the second day God created the firmament – that blue dome over our heads  
-- and separated the waters above the firmament  
from the waters beneath the firmament.
  - 3) and on the third day God separated the dry land from the seas,  
and commanded the earth to bring forth vegetation.

And as we saw last time,  
when Genesis and Psalm 148 speak of the waters above the heavens,  
we need to hear it in its own setting.  
God is revealing both his sovereignty and his nearness.  
When you look up at that blue dome above your heads,  
you need to see the vault of the heavens holding back the waters above.

[And even in modern scientific terms,  
that blue dome – the sky – does hold back chaotic and destructive forces.  
If it wasn't for that blue thing up there,  
all life on earth would be reduced to dust and ashes in seconds.  
It is curious that we call our space vehicle “spaceships” –  
in recognition of this very ancient way of thinking about the cosmic sea.]

So in the first three days we have seen the *tohu vbohu*  
(the barrenness and emptiness of creation)  
turned into a fruitful land ready for habitation.

And so in the second three days (days 4-6) God fills the heavens, the seas, and earth.

## **II. The Filling of the Realms: the Heavens, the Seas, and the Earth**

### **4. Let There Be Lights in the Firmament (1:14-19)**

*And God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens  
to separate the day from the night.*

We saw last time that the word “expanse” is not specific enough.  
The Hebrew word “raqia” (translated “expanse in the ESV)  
is better translated by “firmament”  
because it at the very least *implies* something solid.  
And “firmament” refers to the vault of the heavens  
and also has a root meaning of something solid or *firm*.

Notice that God says that the lights are to be *in* the firmament.  
This again reminds us that we should not be thinking in terms of modern science.  
Today we would not say that the sun, moon and stars are *in* that blue dome,  
but that is the language of ordinary observation.  
We still talk about the stars being in the sky –  
even though scientifically we would say that the stars are in “outer space.”

But I really don't want us to get distracted from the *point* of the text.  
God says:

*And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years,  
and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens  
to give light upon the earth."*

God says that these heavenly lights are to be for signs and seasons, days and years.

As signs they give direction

(not in terms of reading your future in the stars)

but if you are lost at night, you can follow the stars home!)

It is interesting that the sun and moon are not named here.

They are simply called the "greater light" and the "lesser light."

The nations around Israel worshiped the sun and the moon,  
and believed that stars were also divine.

But Genesis 1 speaks of them as anonymous.

They do rule their sphere – they govern the day and the night –

but they do not rule the earth –

they are signs.

*And it was so.*

*And God made the two great lights—*

*the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—  
and the stars.*

*And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth,  
to rule over the day and over the night,  
and to separate the light from the darkness.*

So on the first day, God created light and separated the light from the darkness.

On the first day, God named the light "Day" and the darkness "Night,"

but only on the fourth day does God create the heavenly bodies

that rule day and night,

and separate light from darkness.

Of course, this makes it a bit difficult to tell time prior to the fourth day.

People sometimes make assertions about the length of the creation days,

but the text of Genesis does not support any particular view.

One could argue that days 5-6 were roughly 24 hours long,

but until you have the means to measure time,

you cannot measure time!

Moses certainly presents them as "days" –

but he also presents us with a solid dome and a cosmic sea.

You will sometimes hear people saying that commentators throughout history

all believed that the days were of ordinary length.  
And that is generally true –  
but they were also agreed that the firmament was a cosmic boundary  
holding back the waters above from destroying the earth.

The days of creation are *days*.  
They are not ages or geological epochs.  
They are days.

But the text simply does not provide us with any way of measuring their length  
(at least, certainly not until the end of the fourth day).

*And God saw that it was good.  
And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.*

### **5. Let the Waters Swarm and Birds Fly (1:20-23)**

*And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures,  
and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.”*

On the fifth day God fills the waters and the air under heaven.  
Even as God had separated the waters beneath from the waters above  
by means of the firmament on the second day,  
so also he now on the fifth day fills these regions—  
the lower waters and the air under the firmament.

The sun, moon, and stars had been placed *in* the firmament of the heavens,  
but the birds fly across (literally “on the face of the firmament”).

*So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves,  
with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds,  
and every winged bird according to its kind.  
And God saw that it was good.*

“Great sea creatures” is a bit misleading.  
The word here is “tanninim.”  
It is used 14 times in the OT, and never does it mean something so abstract as  
“great sea creature.”

This is the same word used in Exodus 7:8-12,  
when Moses’ staff becomes a serpent  
and swallows up the serpent/staffs of Pharaoh’s magicians.

There are two different words for serpent:

Nakhash – this is the ordinary word for serpent (and the word used in Genesis 3).  
Tanninim – this would be better translated “sea serpent” or “sea monster.”

In Exodus 4, when God met Moses at the burning bush ,

he commanded Moses to cast down his staff,  
and it became a Nakhash – a serpent.

But then in Exodus 7, when God tells Moses to do the same thing before Pharaoh,  
Aaron's staff does not become a Nakhash (a serpent),  
it becomes a Tannin (the same word translated "great sea creatures" in Genesis 1).

The Egyptians worshiped the serpent-goddess who was the patron deity of the Pharaohs.  
What exactly happened when Aaron threw down his rod?

It is possible that it simply became a cobra,  
but by calling it a Tannin, Moses connects the story of the Exodus  
with the story of the Creation.

The Egyptian goddess Apophis is not the ruler of serpents.  
Rather, it is the LORD God of heaven and earth!

In Deuteronomy 32 (the same passage that refers to Egypt as a "tohu" land –  
a "howling wasteland")

God speaks of the coming judgment against faithless Israel  
by saying that their wine is the poison of "serpents."

Israel will become like Egypt.

Isaiah speaks of Leviathan as a "tannin" – a great dragon in the sea (Is 27:1),  
and also says that God slew the great dragon Rahab (Is 51:9)  
when he brought his people out of Egypt (cf. Psalm 74:13-14).

In Jeremiah 51:34 Nebuchadnezzar is called a Tannin –

as Jeremiah speaks of being digested in the stomach of the monster.

Ezekiel twice speaks of Pharaoh as a great Tannin lying in the waters of the Nile  
(Ez. 29:3 and 32:2).

Psalm 91 says that the one who loves God will trample the Tannin under his feet  
(we looked at this passage at the end of the Romans series –

Psalm 91 is the Psalm quoted by Satan to Jesus in the temptations:

And Jesus is the one who has trampled the serpent under his feet!).

But Psalm 148 says that even the Tanninim give praise to God.

I gave you all these examples to show that the word Tanninim

is not normally used to refer to ordinary animals.

It is possible that a cobra or a crocodile might be referred to as a Tannin,  
but the word is normally used in scripture

to refer to the mythical beasts of the nations around them.

(That is why the best translation of Tannin is usually "dragon.")

All the nations of the Ancient Near East believed in these great sea monsters.

Leviathan, Rahab, and the Babylonian Tiamat are only a few.

And so it is important to see the point that Genesis is making:

The mighty sea monsters that you worship are creatures of the God of Israel!

Unlike the Babylonian Marduk,

the God of Israel did not do battle with the sea monsters,  
he created them!

Certainly the prophets will speak of the LORD doing battle with the sea monsters,  
but that is because of sin!  
And as we'll see in a few weeks, Satan will take the form of a Nakhsh in the temptation,  
but in the book of Revelation he is the dragon – the Tannin.

What does this tell us?

The serpent – the dragon – is trying to return creation to Tohu vbohu.  
The sea (the tehom – the deep, or the abyss) is his home.  
(Revelation will say that the Dragon and his beasts arise out of the sea).  
Darkness is his realm.  
(As Jesus says to those who came to arrest him:  
“This is your hour, and the power of darkness” – Luke 22:53)

But there is a fundamental flaw in Satan's plan.  
Darkness was ordered and named by God.  
The seas were ordered and named by God.  
And the Tanninim – the serpents/dragons which Satan uses as his tools –  
they were not only created by God,  
but they were also *blessed* by God.

*And God blessed them, saying,  
“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas,  
and let birds multiply on the earth.”*

All the birds and the fish – even the great sea monsters, the Tanninim –  
are blessed by God.  
God has taken the tohu vbohu – the empty and barren wasteland  
and has brought forth life.  
This is a good and blessed world that God has made.

Creation is good.  
We sometimes forget this, because creation has been marred.  
But before the curse, God *blessed* the creatures he made.

Genesis 1 reveals the utter absurdity of Satan's plans.  
All idolatry is stripped bare of its pretensions!  
All the *things* you worship are creatures created and blessed by God.  
Idolatry can only be a corruption of something good.  
Everything was created by God.  
Everything was created good.

*And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.*



## 6. Let the Earth Bring Forth Living Creatures and Let Us Make Man (1:24-31)

*And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—  
livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds."*

*And it was so.*

*And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds  
and the livestock according to their kinds,  
and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind.*

*And God saw that it was good.*

On the sixth day, God again commands the *earth* to bring something forth  
(like he did on the third day).

And once again, the earth obeys the voice of the Creator.

And God made the beasts (wild animals)  
and livestock (tame animals)  
and creeping things (reptiles/insects) according to their kinds.

And once again, on the sixth day (like the third day) there are two actions.

Even as God prepared the realm of the earth on the third day,  
so now on the sixth day he creates the inhabitants of that realm.

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..."*

We'll come back to the creation of man next time.

The one thing that I want to point out here is that verses 29-30  
are not necessarily saying anything about whether God intended his creatures  
to be vegetarians.

When God says,

*I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth,  
and every tree with seed in its fruit.*

*You shall have them for food.*

*And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens  
and to everything that creeps on the earth,  
everything that has the breath of life,  
I have given every green plant for food.*

This does not mean that all creatures were vegetarian.

What it means is that God gave grains and fruits as the foundation of our diet.

If you think about the language of blessing throughout the scriptures,  
the blessed land is one that overflows with grain, wine and oil –  
grain and fruit.

Indeed, one of the recurring themes in Genesis is the theme of famine:

think especially of Pharaoh's dream of the fat ears and the lean ears,  
the fat cows and the lean cows.

If there is no grain, then soon there will be no meat!

*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.  
Not just “good” but very good.  
And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

### **III. The Sabbath**

#### **7. And on the Seventh Day God Rested (2:1-3)**

*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.  
And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done,  
and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.  
So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy,  
because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.*

There are three things that God blesses:  
the inhabitants of the seas and air (1:22),  
man (1:28) – though one might argue that the animals might be included here  
in Adam, their head,  
and the Sabbath day(2:3).

Blessing is the opposite of *tohu vbohu*.  
The original “*tohu vbohu*” of Genesis 1:2 cannot be called “cursed” –  
but the barrenness and emptiness of the earth prior to God’s creative work  
makes it clear that it was not yet blessed either!

God’s word now brings blessing, life, order, and goodness.

And God establishes this pattern of six days of labor and one day of rest.  
And he blesses the Sabbath day.

It has been said that while for God the pattern was six days of labor and one of rest,  
for man, it was different.

Adam would have rested on the first full day after he was created,  
and then began his labors the following day.

The Sabbath is not a day for idleness and frivolity.

It is a day for holy resting.

It is a day for worship – a day for setting our hearts and minds on Christ our King,  
our Creator and Lord.

### **Conclusion**

You may have noticed that I have not dealt with the question of the “days” yet.  
I wanted to put that last, because they need to be dealt with all together –  
and it makes the most sense to deal with them in the context of the seventh day.

Most English translations render Genesis 1:5:

*And there was evening and there was morning,  
the first day.*

But the Hebrew says “day one”  
and then for the next four days uses a different form:  
*a second day, a third day, a fourth day, a fifth day.*  
And then it adds the definite article for the last two days:  
*the sixth day, the seventh day.*

What is the difference between saying “the first day” and “day one”?  
If you say “the first day” you are emphasizing sequence.  
It is unlikely that you would say “the first day”  
unless you wanted people to think about a second day.

But “day one” stands alone.  
There is a uniqueness to “day one.”  
All other days can point back to a previous day,  
but “day one” stands alone.  
*It is the first day, but unlike all other days it did not arise out of a previous day.*

It is Day One.

The other thing that “day one” does  
is force you to see all the following days in relation to “day one.”  
That is why it says  
“a second day,” (like Day One)  
“a third day,” (like Day One)  
“a fourth day,” (like Day One)  
“a fifth day” (like Day One).

But then it changes again:  
*the sixth day;*  
*the seventh day.*

By doing this, Moses draws our attention to these two days in particular.  
They are not merely days like Day One.  
They are unique.  
The sixth day – because on it God created Man.  
The seventh day – because on it God rested and blessed the seventh day.

I should also correct a common misunderstanding regarding the phrase:  
“and there was evening and there was morning.”  
You’ll find a lot of people claiming  
that this is a typical Hebrew way of speaking of a whole day.  
But you won’t find them giving much evidence for this,  
because in fact this is a typical Hebrew way of referring to the hours  
between dusk and dawn (roughly 4 p.m. to 8 a.m.)

For years I echoed what I had always been told:

evening and morning means a whole day.  
But after saying that one time, I realized that after years of reading through the OT,  
I couldn't think of where else this phrase meant "a whole day."

So I did a simple word study of the Hebrew words,  
and found that the language of "evening and morning"  
is used to refer to the nighttime hours.  
And "morning and evening" invariably speaks of the daytime hours.

There is no place in all of scripture that clearly refers to "evening and morning"  
as a whole day.  
And if you look at the text of Genesis 1, there is no reason to think that it should!  
After all, we have already heard of the events of the "day" –  
now the closing formula of verse 5 tells us  
that after God finished his creative work for the day,  
there was evening and there was morning, day one.

In other words, there was an interlude between God's creative works.

In the period of darkness, which God called "Night,"  
he remained silent.

So Day One consists of God's creative activity in speaking Light into existence,  
separating the light from the darkness,  
naming the Day and the Night,  
and is concluded by the evening and the morning.

How long was this day?  
The text simply doesn't tell us.

That would be one of those questions that Genesis simply isn't interested in.  
It was a Day.  
Day One.

Some have tried to say that it was an Age –  
but there is a very good Hebrew word for age,  
and it does not appear here.  
It was a Day.

Others have tried to say that it was 24-hours –  
but there is nothing in the text that specifies the length of the day.

The days of creation are God's work days.  
They form the pattern for our work days.  
Six days shall you labor and do all your work,  
but on the seventh you shall rest.

And because Hebrews 4 tells us that we are still awaiting the final Sabbath-rest,  
when we will rest from our creation-works,  
even as God rested from his creation-works,  
when we will enter his rest,  
therefore we still rest –  
no longer looking backward to creation,  
but looking forward to the resurrection of the body,  
when there will be no more night – because the Lamb will be our Light,  
when there will be no more death – because He will be our Life,  
when there will be no more sea – because He will be our Rock.  
But until that day, we rejoice that God has given us one day in seven  
to set aside the cares of the week  
and set our hearts and minds on him alone.