

Genesis 1: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Genesis chapter 1 And the darkness he called night.

And there was evening and there was morning the first day. And God said, Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.

And God made the expanse, and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse heaven.

And there was evening, and there was morning, the second day. And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.

And it was so. God called the dry land earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind on the earth.

[1 : 30] And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the third day. And God said, Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night.

And let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years. And let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth. 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. And God saw that it was good.

And there was evening, and there was morning, the fourth day. And God said, Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth, across the expanse of the heavens.

[2 : 34] So God created the great sea creatures, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, each according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth. And there was evening, and there was morning, the fifth day.

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 earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

[3 : 40] So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And God said, Behold, 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. And it was so.

And God saw everything that he has made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day. When reading Genesis chapter 1, many have argued that the

passage is poetry.

The implication being, to their minds, that it is not to be taken so seriously as an account of concrete reality. And in many ways, this is a modern prejudice. The suggestion is that poetry and literature can't reveal deep truths about the world as it really is.

[5 : 00] And that the truest form of expression is that provided by bare scientific prose. But yet, by using a poetic form of expression, the scripture gives us a sense of a world that is alive with connections, analogies, interactions between levels of reality that we would not see merely within a scientific form of expression.

So the form of literature that we have here, which isn't exactly poetry, but a more elevated literary form, is not accidental. It is something that's appropriate to the world that God has created.

And the form of this passage should invite us to reflect upon the reality of the world that God has created. There is an original problem with the world in that it is formless and void.

It's without shape and without structure and without order. And it's also empty. And so those two problems need to be addressed on the one hand by forming and on the other hand by filling.

The first address is the formlessness. The second address is the emptiness. And in the days that follow, there are three days of forming and three days of filling. And each corresponds to the other.

[6 : 13] So we have the creation of the light on the first day. On the fourth day that corresponds to that, the lights fill the heavens. The sun, the moon, and the stars are placed in the heavens.

On the second day, we have the formation of the firmament, heaven above and earth beneath. And on the fifth day, we have the birds that fly across the face of the firmament and the fish that fill the seas.

On the third day, we have the creation of the earth as distinct from the seas. And then on the sixth day, we have the earth bringing forth living creatures that will fill that realm.

And so the first three days involve, among other things, the creation of great binaries, of day and night, of heaven above and earth beneath, and of the sea and the earth. And there's a sort of liturgy that God follows in the course of his action.

It's important to consider the aspect of time as we're going through this passage. It begins with God striking up a beat, as it were. Evening, morning, evening, morning.

[7 : 15] The division between day and night is not a division primarily between object of light in the heavens and darkness around it. It's a division in time between the state of the light and the state of the darkness.

between day and night. And that temporal pattern provides the pattern for what follows. Day by day follows this day-night pattern. And the liturgy that God follows is he speaks.

The creation comes into being or he acts to bring it into being. Then God names his creation. God sees and he judges it. And then there's evening and there's morning, that particular day.

And so God is following a work week. Not every single day has all these elements contained. But more generally, these are the typical patterns that are playing out. And note also the different modes of creation.

God relates to his world in different ways. He relates to the world as the transcendent creator who by the power of his word brings creation into existence from nothing. He also exists as the one who sustains things in their imminent order.

[8 : 23] He holds things together in structure and in their shape, in their form. But he's also the one who gives life and breath to all things. And so in each of these modes of creation, they're each represented at some point and in different overlapping ways within Genesis chapter 1.

On the later days of creation, we see God delegating the rule of his creation. So God has begun by acting himself to order the world. And now increasingly, he passes over the reins.

God doesn't fill the seas. He gives the fish the power to reproduce themselves so that they will fill the seas. He delegates the rule of the heavens to the sun and the moon and the stars.

And he delegates the rule on the earth to human beings. Man is placed at the center of the stage of creation. But this creation does not merely exist for our sake as humanity.

The image of God is the way in which we represent God in our dominion. This shouldn't be narrowly focused on individuals. It should be perhaps read alongside the chapter that follows and should be related to such things as the delegation of the rule of the day and the night to the sun, moon and stars.

[9 : 36] It's a dominion that represents the rule of heaven as it's symbolized on earth. As you look through this chapter, here are a few questions to think about for the rest of the day.

Why did God create the animals? God could have created a world without animals, just with food supplies for instance, or with other machines perhaps to help man work and labor.

Why did God create the animals? What could be learnt from reflecting upon the poetic form of the description of God's creation of humankind in his image? That description is one that has a more elevated form of poetry than that around it.

When God says let us make man in his image. Another question to ask is who might the us be? And in reflecting upon that, how might that help us to read the chapters that follow?
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