

# The Heavens And The Earth

## A look at Genesis 1

By

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Newly Revised Version April 2012

### Introduction

When I originally wrote this article, my purpose was not to make an in-depth study of Genesis chapter one, but my aim was to consider the overall message, highlighting various points with comments and observations. That is still my aim in this re-written version, (though some may think it quite detailed).

At that time, I was heavily influenced by the young earth creationist view, which believes that the early chapters of Genesis must be understood in a literal and historical sense, leading to the inevitable 'alleged' conclusion that the earth is young. In a later revised version of this article, I proceeded to add endnotes to elaborate further on the details, and most of these details had to do with understanding this chapter as though it were describing natural history from God's viewpoint. During the past four years, I have been greatly challenged in regards to scientific origins and biblical interpretation, and I have needed to re-think my views on the early chapters of Genesis, particularly after facing up to the scientific evidence.

I am now much more aware of the various views and interpretations amongst biblical scholars (of which there are quite a few) concerning the early chapters of Genesis and the whole origins debate. Although I am far from grasping all of the issues involved in the Creation/Evolution debate, I have already come to the conclusion that Genesis 1 is not to be taken in a literalistic manner, as though it belonged to the literary genre of science and natural history. Much of the teaching of the Bible is conveyed through metaphors, symbols, poems and parables, and these modes of communication cannot be ruled out when understanding Genesis 1. We must take into account the original ancient context, and audience, of the book of Genesis – and that context is an ancient Near-Eastern one.

Genesis 1 is an ancient religious cosmogony that is full of theological symbolism and meaning. I have come to see very clearly that it is not supposed to be placed on the same level or in the same discussion as the Theory of Evolution and Natural Science! Professor Conrad Hyers sums it up well in his book *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science*,

"Genesis is not in the business of teaching a "young earth" theory of sudden creation in six twenty-four-hour days; nor is it teaching some variant of progressive creation, intermittent or overlapping; nor, for that matter, is it teaching theistic evolution or pantheistic evolution or panentheistic evolution. It does not teach any of these views of science and natural history because it is not using language in that way, for that purpose, or out of secular concerns." (*Chapter 4, Sacred and Secular Accounting*, p. 85, John Knox Press, 1984)

Along similar lines, *The New Bible Commentary* (21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition) says the following in its notes on Genesis 1-2,

"Genesis is not dealing with the issues raised by twentieth-century science but with ideas current in the ancient orient over 3000 years ago. Over against the polytheistic world-view that held there were many gods and goddesses of varying wisdom and power, Genesis declares there is but one God of absolute power and holiness...

...Modern readers should concentrate on these original intentions of Genesis and not bring to the text scientific issues which are foreign to its purpose." (pp. 61-62)

Therefore, in the following revised version of this article, I will attempt to do just that – concentrate on the original intentions of Genesis in its ancient context, in a somewhat simple manner.

## **Genesis 1**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1 NIV)

In this sublime first verse of the Hebrew Scriptures, we are being told the concrete truth that the God<sup>1</sup> who is being revealed in the pages of the Bible is the Creator of the whole universe. Nothing in the cosmos came about by pure accident, therefore, the created order is here for a purpose. There is a personal, spiritual Force behind it all; an Intelligence beyond our understanding; and this universe had a Beginning; it is not infinite. God was the spiritual Cause behind whatever material mechanisms brought the universe into being.<sup>2</sup>

It is more probable that the 'heavens' are referring to the outer regions of stellar space, i.e. the whole universe, but in the context, it is also possible that it is referring to the 'heavens' of the sky that is visible to humans.<sup>3</sup>

The writer of Genesis is telling us simply here that God exists and that He was the One who created the heavens and the earth, with the underlying notion that he created it all for a higher purpose. In the following verses we are given details of the Creator's work in a simple, yet profound, poetic way.

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

(Genesis 1:2 NIV)

The focus now turns to the earth, which is described as a place of complete disorder and emptiness, totally engulfed in water and darkness – all in all, a dark, watery, chaotic place.<sup>4</sup> The deep or abyss is referring to the depths of the waters, which later in scripture refers to the oceans and the subterranean waters.

Then we are told of the presence of God's Spirit preparing to effect a great change to the earth by vibrating or hovering over the waters engulfing the earth.<sup>5</sup> The basic picture is that of Chaos and Flood and Darkness and Emptiness; with the dove-like Spirit of God about to control these 'negative' forces by bringing Order and Separation and Light and Fullness. This is Chaos to Cosmos (i.e. an ordered system).<sup>6</sup>

### The First Day

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

(Genesis 1:3-5 NIV)

The first effect of the Spirit of God, Who is Light, vibrating over the waters of the earth, is the creation of light.<sup>7</sup> **With the entrance of light, there is colour.**

This Light is essential if Darkness is to be brought under control, and God calls it good. The Darkness is not eliminated altogether, but there is a distinct separation between the Light and the Darkness. This separation is described as the beginning of Day and Night, with evenings and mornings – the First Day.

This begins the enumeration of the subsequent days, and the writer composes the narrative in a very poetic, symmetrical manner, one that is full of symbolism, while using the words in such a way as to make it sound like the creative process is occurring over a period of a week in actual, 24-hour days.

Much has been written about the meaning of the 'days' of the creation week, delving into the meaning of the Hebrew words for 'day' and 'age,' etc, but this is usually done by those who believe this narrative should be understood literally as though it belonged in the realm of natural science. I think this kind of view misunderstands the meaning of the whole passage in its original context. At face value, the text reads as though these are normal 24-hour days, but the Near Eastern/Hebraic overtones are evident in the days being described as beginning with the *evening* and followed by the *morning*.<sup>8</sup>

The numerological symbolism is also evident in the 7 days, with very clear echos of the Sabbath day (cf. Exodus 20:8-11). The Sabbath day was based on the Creative Week of Genesis 1, but this is not the same as saying that the creation narrative is to be understood as literal history. Of course, the 7-day week is inherent within creation because God created all things, and the ancients were aware of this seven-fold pattern! Anyone familiar with the Bible will be aware of how significant the number seven is. It has the symbolic meaning of completion and fullness and is used numerous times throughout Scripture. It is especially used in the Sabbath cycles of days, weeks, years and sevens of years (cf. Leviticus 23:3, 15-16, 23-24; 25:1-4, 8-10; Daniel 9:24).

Not only is the number seven prominent in Genesis 1, but the number twelve is also there, though somewhat hidden. Each day is divided into two 12-hour periods, therefore the 6 days of the work of creation took 144 hours (24 x 6 or 12 x 12=144). The symbolism of the number 12 and 144 is very obvious in the vision of Revelation in the New Testament, and it speaks of God's governmental or kingdom authority (cf. Revelation 4:4; 7:1-8; 14:1-5; 21:9-21). This element of God as King or ancient Suzerain establishing his realm or kingdom is, I believe, intermingled in the theological meaning of the Genesis account.

## The Second Day

And God said, "Let there be a vault (*or expanse*) between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

(Genesis 1:6-8 NIV)

The Hebrew word translated 'expanse' or 'vault' means 'stamped,' i.e. a stamped or hammered dome separating the waters above from the waters below. Some translations read 'firmament,' while others read 'dome.' What is being described here can only be truly understood in the light of ancient Near Eastern Cosmologies. These accounts believed that the earth was flat and that the earth was surrounded by water, both above and below. The sky or firmament was viewed as a protective band or dome that prevented the storehouses of water above from cascading down onto the earth causing the abyss of the waters below to engulf the land.<sup>9</sup>

The writer of the creation narrative is using this picture to emphasise that God was the one who made the sky and separated the waters in accordance with his purposes. These physical elements were not gods or goddesses who embodied the material universe. God calls the atmosphere 'heaven,' that is, the sky, the expanse above the earth. This completed the second day.

## The Third Day

And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

(Genesis 1:9-13 NIV)

Now God is pictured as fashioning the earth as a habitable place for various kinds of creatures, and ultimately for human life. The dry land is formed by gathering the waters under the sky into one place.<sup>10</sup> And God saw that it was good.

Then God commands that the land bring forth predominantly green vegetation, including seed-bearing plants, and fruit trees bearing fruit according to its kind, with its own seed within the fruit. This is one of the marvels of nature, that each seed contains the whole plant, or tree and its unique fruit, producing further seeds and so on! God creates, and nature generates, yet His authority governs all. It is interesting to note that *the ground* produced the plants and trees at God's command. This was the necessary provision of food for the creatures that God was going to create. And again, God saw that it was good, emphasising the goodness of the natural creation.

Again, the overarching theme is that it wasn't the gods and goddesses and spirits of the polytheistic cosmologies that created the dry ground and oceans, the plants and the trees, but it was the God of Israel as the One true God who had created all these things and graciously provided for all his creatures.

## The Fourth Day

And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

(Genesis 1:14-19 NIV)

The divinely inspired writer now focuses on the creation of the sun, moon and stars as lights set into the firmament or vault of the sky. These lights, particularly the sun

and the moon, will govern the day and the night so that the darkness of night will still be under the control of the light, keeping a separation between light and darkness.

Another important reason for these luminaries is given, that of being used as signs to mark sacred time (or appointed seasons), and days and years. Scripture and history give us numerous examples of how these 'lights' have been fulfilling their function of marking sacred times and of being heavenly signs.

When the Genesis account is compared with ancient cosmologies (other 'creation' accounts), particularly the Egyptian creation myths, many similarities are discovered. In the Egyptian accounts, great emphasis was placed on the gods and goddesses of the sun, moon, stars and sky.<sup>11</sup> The Genesis account demythologises this notion and states that the one true God made all these lights, as well as the sky and firmament, which are not gods and goddesses to be feared or worshipped, but are elements of nature created by the true Creator of the cosmos. [ALL revolves around the sun \(Son\)](#).

And the heavenly signs are not governed by mystical or magic forces, such as those believed to influence the stars and planets in astrological and occultic practices and the like, but they are said to be governed by the one and only Creator of the whole universe, as he determines – particularly as revealed through the times and seasons contained in his written word given to Israel. And God saw that it was good.

## The Fifth Day

And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

(Genesis 1:20-23 NIV)

On the fifth day, the narrative says that God created all marine life to fill the waters - from the smallest fish and other organisms, to the largest whales and 'sea monsters,' to all of the birds that fly in the air, in fact everything with wings. Again, this strikes at the heart of ancient polytheistic religion, where the gods and goddesses were often personified as various animals, birds and sea creatures.<sup>12</sup>

It would appear that all living organisms have spirit to some degree, for it is the invisible spirit that gives life to all things. Yet the living souls of animals (those with the breath of life in them) differ from plant life, not only in the way they breathe, but also in the fact that they can sense their surroundings and can move about, swarming in the waters, flying in the atmosphere and roaming the earth.

Therefore, due to this clear distinction between plants and animals, for the first time in the account, God blesses a part of His creation (all the sea creatures and the birds) and commands that they "be fruitful" and multiply by generating offspring to fill the seas, and for the birds to increase on the earth. Hence the empty earth begins to be filled with life. And God saw that it was good.

## The Sixth Day

And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

(Genesis 1:24-31 NIV)

Now on the sixth day, the final day of the work of creation, God created all of the creatures that inhabit the earth or land. All land animals, beasts, livestock, reptiles and insects, etc, are included, and each was created according to their kinds. It is also interesting to note that *the land* was to produce all these creatures according to their kinds. This is another nod in the direction of emptying nature of its gods and goddesses, for the earth or land-god did not produce the animals, but the one God brought all these living creatures into being by His power and word.

Again, God saw that all this was good.

Then the pinnacle of God's creation was formed - mankind. And before any women start creating an uproar (as sometimes occurs!), this term 'man-kind' obviously includes both male *and* female, that is, it is short for humankind. Humanity is clearly

given the place of pre-eminence in the earth, as the goal of the whole creative process – which is to fill the once empty earth with wonderful, yet diverse, creatures. The writer mentions for a second time that God blesses a part of His creation, in this case humanity, commanding them to “be fruitful” and to multiply through procreation, and to fill the earth.

The big difference with humanity compared to the other creatures is that mankind is created in the image of God, and they are then commanded to rule the earth as subjectors under God. Here we see the ‘kingdom aspect’ of the narrative, briefly mentioned earlier, coming to the fore, as God, as the Supreme King or Ruler, creates image-bearers to rule over, and subdue, His created order in His stead. This subjection of nature as God’s image-bearers has the thought of good stewardship attached to it, and not the kind of dominion that leads to human destruction of the earth for wicked and selfish reasons.

As all living souls need food to survive, as well as to enjoy, God’s provision is shown in a simplified manner in that He gives all the vegetables, fruit and grain on the entire earth to humanity, and primarily gives all the green vegetation to all the animals for food. This is the wonderful bounty and provision of the Creator and Father of ALL. That is, the provision of Day Three in the vegetation and fruit trees was specifically created for the living creatures, particularly for the goal of the whole creative process – humanity.

God saw all that he had made, AND BEHOLD IT WAS VERY GOOD!<sup>13</sup> The whole of the natural created order is declared to be very good, as it fits the very purposes of God.

## The Seventh Day

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

(Genesis 2:1-4 NIV)

(These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,) - (verse 4, KJV) <sup>14</sup>

The writer completes the narrative (which continues on into Genesis chapter 2) by emphasising the pattern of the seven-day week, which becomes the basis for the



Sabbath day, which was originally given to Israel in the form of a religious ritual; as a special holy day of rest, free from regular work.<sup>15</sup>

Obviously, the purpose of mentioning this rest has nothing to do with the fact that God needed to rest, like we do, but the real aim is to show that He ceased from all His work because He had finished it all in accordance with His purpose, and He completed it all on the seventh day. In Scripture, seven is the number of completion and perfection (refer to the main text above on *The First Day*). [What God starts, He finishes](#). And again, all this was VERY GOOD!

In concluding, it's worth pointing out the parallels in the narrative between Days 1-3 and 4-6. The initial state of Chaos described in verse 2 can be broken down into three states:

1. Darkness
2. Watery Deep or Abyss (or Flood)
3. Empty & Formless Earth

Then a process of separation and forming takes place during the first three days, which corresponds to the three 'chaotic' states:

Day 1 - Separation of Light and Darkness

Day 2 - Separation of the waters, forming the sky

Day 3 - Separation and forming of the dry land and seas; plants

Finally, a process of filling these 'areas' of creation takes place during days four to six, which also corresponds to days one to three:

Day 4 - Sun, moon and stars

Day 5 - Fish and birds

Day 6 - Land animals and humans<sup>16</sup>

This pattern seems to be intentionally laid out this way for the purpose of emphasising the theological and poetic implications of the whole account. Moreover, as already noted, in its original context the creation narrative of Genesis 1 would've been a very powerful statement concerning the monotheistic beliefs of the prophets and people of Israel - and of their Near-Eastern ancestors, right the way back to the first prophet and priest of God Most High, Adam.

**Recommended Further Reading:** *Origins: Christian Perspectives on Creation, Evolution and Intelligent Design* by Deborah B. Haarsma & Loren D. Haarsma (Revised Edition, 2011, Faith Alive Christian Resources)

*The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science* by Professor Conrad Hyers, (John Knox Press, 1984).

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word translated 'God' in Genesis 1 is *Elohim*, which is actually a plural term. From a Christian perspective, this is an indication that the Son of God was intimately involved with the creative process (cf. Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2-3; John 1:1-3). For further study, see *The Sacred Golden Calf* in the Archives section.

<sup>2</sup> Nowhere in this passage does it state that the universe came out of nothing *per se*. In Romans 11:36, Paul states that **ALL is out of God**, so therefore, in actuality, all things came out of God, and not out of nothing! The Latin phrase 'Omnia Ex Nihilo' means 'all out of nothing,' whereas the Latin phrase 'Omnia Ex Deo' means 'all out of God.' Biblically speaking, in the absolute sense, 'all is out of God' for He is the Creator of all things, both physically and spiritually. Yet in relation to the material universe, all *is* 'out of nothing' in the sense that there wasn't any pre-existing material beforehand. God brought all things into being that only previously existed in spirit within Himself.

The nearest the Bible gets to saying 'all out of nothing' is in Hebrews 11:3.

By faith we understand that the worlds (*Gr. the ages*) were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible (*margin: Or was not made out of visible things*). (NRSV)

The writer to the Hebrews was saying that it is only by faith that we can understand that God prepared the worlds or cosmic order by His own word and power so that what we see and observe in the universe was not made from visible things, i.e. pre-existing material! The translation 'worlds' should more literally be 'the ages' but in this context 'the ages' are understood to be something similar to the Greek word 'kosmos' usually translated 'world' – that is, the created order of the universe. I think it is of interest to note that God 'prepared' (or framed or adjusted) the 'worlds' through a process of creation that formed the material universe 'out of nothing.' Although in its biblical context this is probably referring to the 'days' of the creation account in Genesis 1, nevertheless, dare I say it, it is highly probable that, more literally speaking, this could very well be alluding to the creative process of Evolution itself, which prepared the world for the habitation of mankind!

<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew word for heaven or heavens is *shahmahyim*. Throughout the Old Testament, as any good concordance will show, this word can refer to either the atmosphere of the earth (i.e. the sky or the **First Heaven**) or stellar space (i.e. the universe or the celestials; the **Second Heaven**). It is essentially describing that which we see when we look up. Of course, 'looking up' is a relative term because we are situated on a sphere hanging in space! It would be more literally accurate to say 'looking out' rather than 'up.' Nevertheless, from our position on earth, as the ancients would understand it, this is looking *up*. There are also many instances where

the word *heaven(s)* is referring to the spirit realm where the dwelling place of God is situated (i.e. the **Third Heaven**; cf. 2 Corinthians 12:1-4), and where the spirit beings or 'angels' dwell. This is especially the case in the phrase 'Kingdom of the heavens.' The ancients often understood the world in accordance with a three-tiered model (for example, heaven, earth and under the earth; as well as three heavens).

There are also two special phrases in Hebrew: a) **Heavens of the heavens** (Psalm 68:33); and b) **Heaven of the heavens** (2 Chronicles 2:6). The first primarily refers to the Second Heaven (i.e. stellar space, although it could also include the First Heaven, i.e. the sky. The stars and the sky are interconnected; hence the phrase probably includes both. The celestials or starry hosts are often figured as the spirit world and its inhabitants). This corresponds with the Hebrew (and Greek) phrases literally translated '*holies of the holies*' and '*eons of the eons*.' The second phrase b) above refers to the dwelling place of God (i.e. the spirit realm or the heavenly Temple of God). It is often translated as '*the highest heaven*.' This corresponds with the Hebrew (and Greek) phrases literally translated '*Holy of the holies*' and '*Eon of the eons*.'

Be that as it may, it is fairly evident that the phrase '*heavens and the earth*' in Gen. 1:1 is inclusive of the whole universe.

<sup>4</sup> There are those who believe in the 'Gap Theory' and the 'Pre-Adamite Earth' theory, which places a gap of indeterminate length between verses 1 & 2. This is largely held by creationists who take this chapter literally, so to make the text conform to the scientific evidence of long ages, a gap is put in. I used to hold to this view many years ago, but I came to see that this interpretation could not hold water. Some of my earlier writings, though, still have remnants of these theories within them as a means of showing another 'possible' interpretation of ancient events, though I am now strongly persuaded that the Gap Theory is incorrect. This Theory, also known as the 'Ruin-Reconstruction' theory, is largely based on semantics and reading things into the biblical text that just aren't there. (For further information on this subject from the 'literalist' standpoint, see *An Appendage: The Disruption in God's Plan of The Ages* in the Archives section).

Firstly, many who hold to the Gap theory make a marked distinction between the Hebrew words *bara* (create) and *asah* (make) but on closer examination, this doesn't hold up. For example, Isaiah 45:18 uses the words **created**, **fashioned**, **made** and **formed** to describe the original creation of the earth and its atmosphere (the heavens, including stellar space), when God purposed to fill the earth with creatures rather than leave it empty and uninhabited. These words are all describing the same thing - the original creation and formation of the earth and its heavens in the creation account of Genesis 1.

Nehemiah 9:6 is another case in point. It states that Yahweh **made** the heavens, the earth and all that is on it, the seas, and all living creatures - and also the highest heavens (lit. 'the heaven of heavens'; i.e. the spirit world, figured in the celestials or stellar space) and their starry host. No one would argue the point that this is describing the original creation of the universe - when God **made** all things. There are numerous cases in Scripture where God is called both **Creator** and **Maker** of all things. These words are two sides of the same coin.

Secondly, the Hebrew word *hayetah* (root *hayah*) translated as 'was' or 'became' in Genesis 1:2 is describing the existence or 'coming to be' of the earth. When God first brought the earth into being, as described in Genesis 1, it is pictured as a chaotic (formless) planet that was empty (Hebrew *Tohu* and *Bohu*) and void of life. It was in darkness and covered in water (i.e. the abyss). That is to say, according to the narrative, when God first created the earth, He also

created water to cover or 'flood' the whole earth. This is the state that the earth is in when we are first introduced to the creative process in Genesis 1. The Apostle Peter confirms this in 2 Peter 3:5. Then God begins to fashion, make and create the earth to be habitable for man and animals in 'six days.'

Also, there isn't any clear biblical evidence that tells us anything whatsoever about a Pre-Adamite earth. It is only a speculative theory that tries to harmonize the theories and interpretations of modern science in relation to the age of the earth and the universe to accord with a literal reading of Genesis 1.

It is also evident from Job 38:4-7 (depending on how one interprets it) that the spirit beings (i.e. the angels; Heb. 'sons of God') were in existence before the earth was created, for they shouted for joy when God created the earth, but for how long before, we are not told. It is possible that a 'First Age' existed before the earth was created, but it was primarily a spiritual age, that is, it involved the spirit world rather than the material world. According to Colossians 1:15-17, Paul is saying that the beginning of creation began with the invisible things in heaven, as well as the earth. It would appear as though that is the only thing we can be certain about from the words of Scripture. In relation to the events of creation, we must remember, as Job said, that "God performs wonders that **cannot be fathomed..**" (Job 9:10). Praise God for His power and wonders and wisdom!

<sup>5</sup> The descriptive words 'hovering,' 'vibrating,' 'brooding,' are indicative of the fluttering of bird's wings. In the New Testament in particular, the Holy Spirit of God is embodied in the form of a dove, which occurred at Christ's baptism (cf. Luke 3:22).

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that, in its ancient context, this description of the beginning of creation would've been very familiar to it's readers, as the Egyptian and Sumerian cosmologies began in a similar way. The major difference between them is that the Hebrew account of Genesis is emphasising the belief in One God, who brought all things into being, as opposed to the polytheistic beliefs of the surrounding cultures who often personalised the created things as being in the form of gods and goddesses.

<sup>7</sup> Light and sound are essentially different vibrations and varying wavelengths. White light is composed of the pure colours of the spectrum (the rainbow). Hence, there's an interesting connection here in the vibrating element with the actual reality of what light is. Ultimately, the revelation here is that God is Light, and light is foremost in the account.

<sup>8</sup> It appears to me that the 'young earth' creationists (YEC) are generally more consistent in their exegesis of Scripture when they understand the days of the creation week to be normal days, and they also note that the Sabbath day was based on God's creative week (cf. Exodus 20:8-11). On the other hand, 'Progressive' or 'Day-Age' creationists (old earth creationists) tend to be more consistent with the scientific evidence than their YEC counterparts, and yet a little inconsistent with their biblical exegesis – making the days of the creative week equal to millions or billions of years. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that both of these views are making the same mistake of trying to interpret Genesis 1 as though it were literal history, that is, interpreting the narrative in an ultra-literalistic manner as though it belonged to the genre of natural history and modern science.

Either way you look at it, an honest student has to accept the fact that the scientific evidence does not support a literal, historical reading of Genesis 1. The sequences are very different. And besides, the sequences of the creative events are somewhat contradictory also in the two

accounts of Genesis 1 & 2, quite apart from the scientific evidence. Also, how could plants survive before the sun was created?

See the following table taken from page 111 of the book *Origins: Christian Perspectives on Creation, Evolution and Intelligent Design* by Deborah B. Haarsma & Loren D. Haarsma (Revised Edition, 2011, Faith Alive Christian Resources)

<http://www.faithaliveonline.org/origins/charts/images/page111.png> (accessed 25/04/2012).

<sup>9</sup> The well-known creation Psalm 104 contains elements of this kind of language. For further information, see the following link, which is a supplement to Chapter 6 of the book *Origins: Christian Perspectives on Creation, Evolution and Intelligent Design* by Deborah B. Haarsma & Loren D. Haarsma (Revised Edition, 2011, Faith Alive Christian Resources) -

[http://www.faithaliveonline.org/origins/pdf/Origins\\_06-02.pdf](http://www.faithaliveonline.org/origins/pdf/Origins_06-02.pdf) (accessed 23/04/2012).

<sup>10</sup> There are some who highlight the wording in Genesis 1:9-10 where it states that the waters flowed together into **one place**, thereby surrounding the dry Land (singular). To some, this indicates the probability that the land was originally one Super-Continent surrounded by the waters, which scientists call *Pangaea*. Others then conclude that the continents that we know today were formed during the Great Flood. Again, this view, as interesting as it is, is interpreting the text in a more literal, historical sense, which is clearly not the intention of the original writer of Genesis.

<sup>11</sup> For further study of these things, see the following article by Rikk Watts (no relation, as far as I know!) entitled *Making Sense of Genesis 1* -

[http://www.stimulus.org.nz/index\\_files/Stim12\\_4RikkWatts.pdf](http://www.stimulus.org.nz/index_files/Stim12_4RikkWatts.pdf) (accessed 24/04/2012).

<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that, in Genesis 1:21, where most translations read either 'great whales' or 'great creatures' or 'great sea monsters,' the Hebrew word is *tanniyn*. This stems from the root word *tan*, which means 'that which is stretched or elongated.' This same Hebrew word (also *tanniym*) is used a number of times throughout the OT. It is commonly translated as either 'dragons' or 'jackals' or 'whales.' All of these renderings seem a little inconsistent to me.

I would suggest the following: the only English word that seems to fit most occurrences of this word is - **reptile(s)**. Exodus 7 gives us a big clue. In verses 9, 10 and 12 the Hebrew *tanniyn* is used, yet in verse 15 we are clearly told that Aaron's rod turned into a serpent or snake (Hebrew *nachash*). Of course, snakes are reptilian creatures that are 'elongated,' and **snake(s)** would fit most occurrences of the word *tanniyn(m)* - even 'great sea snakes' such as the mythical Leviathan of ancient Near Eastern religions.

Be that as it may, Micah 1:8 talks of 'wailing like *tanniym*.' Now as far as I'm aware at present, snakes don't wail nor do reptiles in general! So it seems to me that we should not limit this word to just snake(s) - yet the word **reptile(s)** appears to fit quite well. The Komodo Dragon of Indonesia is a good example of a large reptile, but whether it could be said to 'wail' I don't know. Anyhow, many extinct reptiles (dinosaurs) probably wailed.

Nevertheless, there is another text that poses a problem with this view. Lamentations 4:3 refers to *tanniyn* suckling their babies, which refers to mammals, not reptiles. So even **reptiles** may not be the right word to encompass every description of *tanniyn*.

Of course, the really interesting thing is that the word 'dinosaur' means 'terrible lizard' - or reptile! Also the mythical dragon may possibly have some basis in fact, going by all of the

dragon fables throughout the world, and Scripture refers figuratively to Satan as the Dragon, who is also the Serpent! So there is a clear connection between the Hebrew word *tanniyn*, and dragons, snakes - and reptiles in general. Nevertheless, I think it would be safe to say that *tanniyn(m)* are ferocious, dangerous creatures that are often very large (i.e. monsters), and they can include reptiles or mammals, whether on land or in water. It can therefore include dinosaurs and other extinct creatures.

In the context of Genesis, and, in fact, the whole of the OT, a connection to the mythical creatures of the ancient Near Eastern polytheistic religions is of great significance, for Yahweh is declared to be the one who created all the sea creatures and land animals, and not the mythical monster-gods of the Egyptians or Sumerians or Canaanites, etc. Or if any of them did exist, Yahweh created them! (Cf. Leviathan & Behemoth imagery, Job 40:15-41:34; Psalm 74:12-17; 104:25-26; Isaiah 27:1).

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that, in total, there are **seven** 'good's' in this narrative of Genesis 1, with the seventh and last one being 'very good.' For the significance and symbolism of the number seven, refer to *The First Day* portion of the main text above.

1. The light of Day One (verse 4)
2. The dry land and the seas on Day Three (verse 10)
3. The seed-bearing plants and trees on Day Three (verse 12)
4. The sun, moon and stars on Day Four (verse 18)
5. The sea creatures and the birds on Day Five (verse 21)
6. The land animals on Day Six (verse 25)
7. Humanity on Day Six ("all was very good" - verse 31)

Much has been made over the fact that a 'good' has been omitted from the making of the firmament and sky on Day Two, but whatever the reason, we can only speculate as to why. I think it is purely for symmetrical or poetic reasons, nevertheless, at the very end of the narrative, God calls *all that he has made* as "very good" - and this includes the sky!

<sup>14</sup> There is some debate as to whether verse 4 belongs to the end of the first account or to the beginning of the second account, or possibly both! It could be that the first half of the verse belongs to the first account, while the second half belongs to the beginning of the second account. This problem is largely due to the fact that there wasn't any punctuation in the original languages.

There is a similar phrase in Genesis chapter 5:1, and this clearly begins the genealogical record of Adam in the rest of chapter 5. The KJV more accurately reads 'generations' in both these verses, as cited above, relating the account to a genealogy. Conrad Hyers thinks that there is a deliberate connection here between '*the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created*' and the genealogical 'family trees' of the polytheistic pantheons of gods and goddesses. He therefore believes that 2:4a belongs to the end of the first creation account, which acts as "a final pun on the concept of the divine family tree." Taken from the book *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science* by Professor Conrad Hyers, p.45, (John Knox Press, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> The Sabbath day became a part of the Law of Moses, being included in the Ten Commandments, but under the New Covenant established by Jesus the Messiah, the Sabbath can be kept any day (cf. Romans 14:5-6). The Law was a type and shadow of Christ and the New Covenant of Grace (cf. Colossians 2:16-17). The ultimate rest or ceasing from our works is

to inherit the kingdom of God, which is the true Sabbath rest (cf. Hebrews 4:1-11). And this Sabbath-rest is pictured as being God's Rest or Ceasing after he had created all things.

There may very well be an analogy here in the Genesis 1 account picturing the rest of a God-King upon his throne after the completion of his temple. That is, the whole of creation, but especially the earth, is viewed as being God's Temple (cf. Isaiah 66:1-2). I hope to consider this topic at a later time.

<sup>16</sup> See also the following table taken from page 132 of the book *Origins: Christian Perspectives on Creation, Evolution and Intelligent Design* by Deborah B. Haarsma & Loren D. Haarsma (Revised Edition, 2011, Faith Alive Christian Resources)  
<http://www.faithaliveonline.org/origins/charts/images/page132.png> (accessed 25/04/2012)

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