

Genesis One - Reflections elsewhere in scripture

We moved quickly through a lot material.

Thoughts? Questions?

Did anyone try any of the readings?

What did you make of them in relation to Genesis chapter 1?

Review

Verse 1 seems to serve as a title or summary of the entire creation.

We begin with the earth in darkness, formless, and empty: just dark waters (the abyss).

The Spirit of God hovered (a bird image) over the waters.

God deals with the darkness, the formlessness, and the waters.

3 days of ordering: God separate on these three days.

3 days of filling with life: God fills each 'area' with beings and living things

Finally, we have a day of rest without beginning or ending.

"Image and likeness" are found on other artifacts from that time. They are used on statues to assert the rule of a king in a region and to remind people of his laws. In Canada, we might say that the Governor General is the "Image and likeness" of the King. There is no expectation that there will be any resemblance. They may not even be the same gender at times. Instead, the GG represents the rule of the monarch in Canada.

Just as the lamps were called to rule to heavens and did so by separating, which had been God's work to that point, humanity is called to represent God's rule on earth, bringing order and fullness of life.

There is no hierarchy in Genesis 1 between male and female. The calling is shared. A full picture of humanity requires male and female.

What else occurs to you? What is the author telling us about God? About creation? About humanity?

Other creation stories from the Ancient Near East

Genesis 1 is unique in ancient creation stories. The author's insight into God's motives for creating, the way God created, and how God responds to Creation, stand out even more when compared with every other account we know of. We can see in scripture that the authors and prophets were familiar with the stories of surrounding cultures as well. The author of Genesis had these options available but chose something new and different.

The *Enuma Elish* has many parallels in the ancient near east. Each city would have changes that lift the name of their God above others. This version is taken from Babylon, and Marduk is the hero who confronts Tiamat, a serpent like creature connected to the sea or the waters. Tiamat collects an army of creatures to fight the gods but is defeated by Marduk. He divides her body in two, fixing half above and half below in such a way that the waters above are held back.

From the Fourth Tablet:

“128. And unto Tiamat, whom he (Marduk) had conquered, he returned.

129. And the lord stood upon Tiamat's hinder parts,

130. And with his merciless club he smashed her skull.

131. He cut through the channels of her blood,

132. And he made the North wind bear it away into secret places.

133. His fathers beheld, and they rejoiced and were glad;

134. Presents and gifts they brought unto him.

135. Then the lord rested, gazing upon her dead body,

136. While he divided the flesh of the ..., and devised a cunning plan.

137. He split her up like a flat fish into two halves;

138. One half of her he stablished as a covering for heaven.

139. He fixed a bolt, he stationed a watchman,

140. And bade them not to let her waters come forth.

141. He passed through the heavens, he surveyed the regions (thereof),

142. And over against the Deep he set the dwelling of Nudimmud.”

The sixth tablet describes how Marduk and Ea, from their dead enemies create humans to be servants of the gods and to build them shrines.

- “1. When Marduk heard the word of the gods,
2. His heart prompted him and he devised [a cunning plan].
3. He opened his mouth and unto Ea [he spake],
4. [That which] he had conceived in his heart he imparted [unto him]:
5. "My blood will I take and bone will I [fashion],
6. "I will make man, that man may ... [...].
7. "I will create man who shall inhabit [the earth],"
8. "That the service of the gods may be established, and that [their] shrines 1 [may be built].
9. "But I will alter the ways of the gods, and I will change [their paths];
10. "Together shall they be oppressed 2, and unto evil shall [they ...]."
11. And Ea answered him and spake the word:
12. "[...] the [...] of the gods I have [changed]
13. [...] ... and one ... [...]
14. [...shall be de]stroyed and men will I [...]"

The quotes above are taken from a translation of the most complete set of stone tablets, found in Babylon:

<https://sacred-texts.com/ane/enuma.htm>

I do not agree with the notion that these stories “inspired” the author of Genesis 1. Instead, the author has rejected them and their theology and proposed something very different. But the authors of scripture were familiar with stories.

The serpent of the waters appears under several names throughout the Old Testament: Sea monsters, the serpent, Rahab, dragon, and leviathan.

First, in Genesis 1:21: “God created the great sea monsters.” They do not rival God, they are his creatures. Job 41 paints a similar picture: Leviathan is God’s plaything.

Psalm 74 is a psalm lamenting the exile and destruction of Jerusalem and then remembering God's act of creation but it does so using the language of the Babylonian stories:

10 How long, O God, is the foe to scoff?
Is the enemy to revile your name forever?

11 Why do you hold back your hand;
why do you keep your hand in your bosom?

12 Yet God my King is from of old,
working salvation in the earth.

**13 You divided the sea by your might;
you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters.**

**14 You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.**

**15 You cut openings for springs and torrents;
you dried up ever-flowing streams.**

16 Yours is the day, yours also the night;
you established the luminaries and the sun.

17 You have fixed all the bounds of the earth;
you made summer and winter.

18 Remember this, O Lord, how the enemy scoffs,
and an impious people reviles your name.

Job refers to the serpent and leviathan several times before chapter 41.

Job demonstrates that the sea and the dragon are understood to be the same being: 7.12 Am I the Sea, the Dragon, that you set a guard over me?

Job 26 reflects on God's power and wisdom using the same language as the surrounding cultures.

7 He (God) stretches out the north over the void,
and hangs the earth upon nothing.

8 He binds up the waters in his thick clouds,
and the cloud is not torn open by them.

9 He covers the face of the full moon,

and spreads over it his cloud.

10 He has described a circle on the face of the waters,
at the boundary between light and darkness.

11 The pillars of heaven tremble,
and are astounded at his rebuke.

**12 By his power he stilled the Sea;
by his understanding he struck down Rahab.**

**13 By his wind the heavens were made fair;
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.**

14 These are indeed but the outskirts of his ways;
and how small a whisper do we hear of him!
But the thunder of his power who can understand?"

Psalm 89 is a prayer to God recalling David's dynastic covenant after the exile and sack of Jerusalem, and calling to mind God's power in creation but using language similar to the Babylonian stories.

6 For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord?

Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord,

7 a God feared in the council of the holy ones,
great and awesome above all that are around him?

8 O Lord God of hosts,
who is as mighty as you, O Lord?
Your faithfulness surrounds you.

**9 You rule the raging of the sea;
when its waves rise, you still them.**

**10 You crushed Rahab like a carcass;
you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.**

11 The heavens are yours, the earth also is yours;
the world and all that is in it—you have founded them.

Isaiah 24-27 as a whole is a powerful series of chapters, including a passage where God destroys death. This section's conclusion begins with these words:

27.1 On that day the Lord with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea.

In Isaiah 51, the same language is used again, this time in reference to the Exodus. Creation and salvation are often considered synonymous.

9 Awake, awake, put on strength,
O arm of the Lord!

**Awake, as in days of old,
the generations of long ago!
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,
who pierced the dragon?**

**10 Was it not you who dried up the sea,
the waters of the great deep;
who made the depths of the sea a way
for the redeemed to cross over?**

11 So the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Scripture ends with an enigmatic statement in Revelation, which makes a lot more sense once you consider all of the role of the sea in the ancient stories.

Rev 21.1 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.”

Genesis one is unique in the ancient world in several respects.

- There is no violence and no contest. God simply speaks and it is.
- God does not create creatures to serve his own needs. Life is a gift and creatures are invited to thrive and eat.

Genesis and the Hebrew Scriptures

Our English bibles put the books of the Hebrew Scriptures into the following categories:

Law - Historical - Poetical - Prophets

The Hebrew bible is organized differently: the Teaching (law), the prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and the prophets), and the Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, etc, but also Daniel and Chronicles).

The bible is called the TaNaK, a word which is made from the first letter of Torah (teaching), Nevi'im (the Prophets), Ketuvim (writings).

In the New Testament, people call it "the law, the prophets and the writings", or "Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms."

Either way, Genesis 1 establishes the context for all that follows.

I think the most helpful way of understanding the place of Genesis 1 is not the first event in a sequence of events but an overview of the nature of life. In this case, the story of Eden doesn't take place after creation, but within the big picture offered in chapter One. Genesis 1 sets the larger scene and the rest of Genesis increasing becomes narrow in focus until it settles on the story of one family, that of Abraham and Sarah.

The rest of the Hebrew scripture arguably continuously draw on Genesis 1. Creation, wisdom, and law are repeatedly connected in the Psalms and Prophets. This perspective also provides a rationale for the laws requiring separation and the laws honouring life

Genesis 1 is a complete story comes to a satisfying end where all is good and all creation enters God's rest. This arguably is never the case in our lives or in scripture until the vision of Revelation.

We might observe that each section of the Hebrews ends with God's promises unfulfilled: the Torah ends with Moses' death and God's people looking at the

promised land from outside; the Prophets ends with God's people waiting for God's return to the temple; the Writings end with God's people in exile.

It is tempting to say that all of the books invite us to remember God's purpose in creation and to say that this is God's goal but we never really reach it? The question is, which side will you choose? Creation and law? Order and fulness of life?

It is also compelling to reflect on Jesus' words on the cross in the Gospel According to John: It is finished.