

How would you describe the earth, as you picture it in your mind?
How would you describe heaven, as you picture it in your mind?

Read Genesis 1-2:3 as provided. Feel free to compare with your bible. Although it may be obvious or well known, try and focus on what the text says, setting aside our expectations. Read through, mark anything of interest, anything strange, or patterns, repetition.

Comments

What happened between verse 1 and 2?

Is verse 1 more of a summary of the entire first chapter, a title of sort? Is it “step one” in a series of steps of creation? Did something happen to interfere with creation after step one to make the earth formless and void? Or is it, as some translate it, “In the beginning, *when God was creating the heavens and the earth, the earth was...*

Formless and empty “wild and waste”

The hebrew words rhyme: tohu bohu. Shapeless or nothingness and emptiness.

Jeremiah used these words to capture the horrors we could see coming upon his city and people:

4:19 My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain!

Oh, the walls of my heart!

My heart is beating wildly;

I cannot keep silent;

for I hear the sound of the trumpet,
the alarm of war.

20 Disaster overtakes disaster,
the whole land is laid waste.

Suddenly my tents are destroyed,
my curtains in a moment.

23 I looked on the earth, and lo, it was **waste and void**;
and to the heavens, and they had no light.

24 I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,
and all the hills moved to and fro.

25 I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,
and all the birds of the air had fled.
26 I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,
and all its cities were laid in ruins
before the Lord, before his fierce anger.
27 For thus says the Lord: The whole land shall be a desolation;
yet I will not make a full end.

Formlessness, or chaos, and “great sea monsters” were central to all ancient middle-eastern peoples. We will come back to other creation stories and these images.

The Ruah Elohim

This can be translated as a “wind from God” or “the Spirit of God.” The verb used shows up again in Deut. 32:10-11:

The Lord sustained him in a desert land,
in a howling wilderness waste;
he shielded him, cared for him,
guarded him as the apple of his eye.

11 As an eagle stirs up its nest,
and hovers over its young,
as it spreads its wings, takes them up,
and bears them aloft on its pinions,

12 the Lord alone guided him;
no foreign god was with him.

The Word of God

God creates simply by calling things into being. The verb tense is not the imperative, not a command, but an invitation. God appears more like a orchestral conductor here.

10 times we read “God said.” These ten words of creation at the beginning of the Law match “the 10 words” (what we call 10 the commandments). The Gospel writers had no doubts about the triune nature of this passage. Jesus’ baptism is a reenactment of Genesis verse 1-3. John chapter 1 is explicit about the connection between Jesus and Genesis 1.

Larger structure of the 7 days

Days 1 to 3: God brings form to the formless by separating.

Day 1 God deals with the darkness

Day 2 and 3 God with the waters

Days 4 to 6 God brings fullness to what was empty in correspondence to the days of separating.

Both 4 and 6 have a “bonus” creation: plants on day 4 and humanity on day 6.

Firmament: raqiyah (Septuagint *stereoma*)

On day 2 God, created the firmament. The hebrew word get translated into dome, expanse, vault. Some of these have in mind the space created between the waters. But the hebrew seems to have more a thin plate in mind that holds back the waters above.

The root of the hebrew word for firmament is a verb that means to hammer something out, spreading it out like gold leaf.

Job 37.18 Can you, like him, **spread out** the skies,
hard as a molten mirror?

In Exodus 35.3 Gold leaf was **hammered** out and cut into threads to work into the blue, purple, and crimson yarns and into the fine twisted linen, in skilled design.

Psalms 136 also describes the earth like a plate, spread out:

- 4 who alone does great wonders,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 5 who by understanding made the heavens,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 6 who **spread out** (*raqh*) the earth on the waters,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 7 who made the great lights,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 8 the sun to rule over the day,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 9 the moon and stars to rule over the night,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

The “lamps”

The great lamps are given rule over the heavens and over ordered time. God separated in days 1 to 3 and now these heaven rulers carry on the divine task of separating.

Sun in hebrew is shemesh; Moon in hebrew is yareakh. Both of these were also names of Canaanite gods. Perhaps that is why their proper names are not used, and “lamps” is used instead.

Humanity

Just as the great lamps were called to rule the heavens, humanity is called to rule the earth.

“Let us make” It isn’t clear why this is plural. Is a royal we? Is it trinitarian? Is God talking to other creatures? Or all creation?

Does “likeness and image” mean resemblance? Or function?

The Tel fakhariyah statue inscription: the stone is the “likeness and image” of the God. The stone was designed to express the authority of the king and the boundaries of his kingdom. Any resemblance is secondary.

Rest - Shabat (Shabbath - Sabbath)

The seventh day has no beginning or end. What does this mean? The author of Hebrews refers to God’s rest remaining open (Hebrews 4)

Heschel: the sabbath is the crown of creation

Dell: Time is the one dimension we can share without conflict.

If humanity will not let the land rest, God intervenes and gives the land rest shabat:

Levi. 26 31 I will lay your cities waste, will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing odours. 32 I will devastate the land, so that your enemies who come to settle in it shall be appalled at it. 33 And you I will scatter among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword against you; your land shall be a desolation, and your cities a waste.

34 Then the land shall enjoy its sabbath years as long as it lies desolate, while you are in the land of your enemies; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbath years. 35 As long as it lies desolate, it shall have the rest it did not have on your sabbaths when you were living on it.

Similarly, four times in Judges, the author observes, “and the land had rest for (x) years.”