

The Book of Beginnings – Studies in Genesis

LESSON VIII : GENESIS 1:6-8 – PARAGRAPH TWO: THE SECOND DAY

“Thus on the second day of creation the world was something like an undifferentiated mass, or ‘original amorphous matter.’ Perhaps it would be comparable to having a room full of mud and water and heat, pulsating like a moving blob. In it there would have been no breathing space. In other words, all the material elements were present as well as energy, but the dividing (or separating) and organizing of these elements which would be necessary to make the earth habitable had not yet occurred. It was, to use the old Greek concept, a chaos, and not yet a cosmos. What happened on Day Two is that God by His creative activity, by His very speaking, divided out this uninhabitable mass of gasses, ‘mud’ and energetic elements, thus producing open breathing space or something like ‘atmosphere.’” [Kelly, 236]

amorphous – adj;
'without a clearly
defined shape or form'

‘The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.’ (Ps 19:1)

‘Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.’ (Dan 12:3)

The Second Day:

‘⁶ Then God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.” ⁷ Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. ⁸ And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.’ (Gen 1:6-8 NKJV)

Rabbi Cassuto’s translation:

v. 6 – And God said,

***“Let there be a firmament / in the midst of the waters,
and let it serve as a means of separating / the waters from the waters.”***

v. 7 – And God made the firmament / and separated

***the waters / which were under the firmament
from the waters / which were above the firmament.***

And it was so.

v. 8 – And God called / the firmament Heaven.

And there was evening and there was morning, / a second day.

v. 6 – ‘And God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it serve as a means of separating the waters from the waters.”’ – rāqî‘a [firmament] — In the midst of the waters of the deep, which constituted the upper layer of the original shapeless matter, there was to be formed a ‘firmament,’ the word used in most of our versions. Other translations say ‘expanse’ (ESV, NASV, NET, AMP, Darby); ‘dome’ (NRSV, Good News Translation, Common English

Bible [CEB]); *'vault'* (NIV); *'canopy'* (International Standard Version). It comes from the Hebrew word used in Exod 39:3, *'And they beat the gold into thin sheets;'* (NKJV) or *'and they hammered out gold leaf'* (ESV). The term signifies a kind of horizontal layer, a thin stretched-out space; thus here it is a horizontal layer in the very heart of the mass of water and separating it into two layers, one above the other, the *'upper and lower layers of water.'* As to its appearance as we as humans gaze above, it is described as a curtain spread out above the earth (Ps 104:2; Isa 40:22) or a transparent work of sapphire (Ex 24:10). Job says of the firmament, *'Can you, like him, spread out the skies, hard as a cast metal mirror?'* (Job 37:18). Ezekiel 1:22 and Daniel 12:3 describe the firmament as bright and shiny. Some suggest the firmament was as a *'glass dome'* but that would just be the figurative language of poetry. Some believe the ancient Hebrews thought this to be a solid mass; e.g., *'hard as a cast metal mirror,'* Job 37:18, and the root of the word does include the sense of metalworking; but the majority of the commentators I am using reject that notion. ***The consensus is that our verses are not concerned with defining the nature of the firmament but rather with asserting God's power over the waters. God alone rules the powers of the heavens.***

We are not told how this space between heaven and earth was formed. Rabbi Cassuto says it makes the most sense to be explained in light of v. 8, *'And God called the firmament Heaven.'* "From this we may infer that immediately after its formation, the firmament occupied of its own accord the place appointed for it by the will of God, which is the site of the heavens as we know it. Thus as soon as the firmament was established in the midst of the layers of water, it began to rise in the middle, arching like a vault, and in the course of its upward expansion it lifted at the same time the upper waters resting on top of it. This marked a considerable advance in the marshalling of the components of the universe. Above now stands the vault of heaven surmounted by the upper waters; beneath stretches the expanse of lower waters, that is, the waters of the vast sea, which still covers all the heavy, solid matter below. The universe is beginning to take shape." [Cassuto, 31f]

WHAT DOES THE 'FIRMAMENT' ENTAIL? — There is unanimous agreement with those I have read that the earth's atmosphere is part of what the Scriptures call the *'firmament;'* what is not agreed upon is to the upper extent of this firmament. Most of the commentators I am using limit the firmament to our atmosphere, thus the *'waters above the firmament'* are the clouds (e.g., Wenham, 1:16; Waltke, 62; Mathews, 1:150; Hamilton, 1:122ff; Ross, 109; Carroll, 51ff; Calvin, 80ff; Keil, 53f; Gill, 5f). Henry Morris adds that while the firmament is our present atmosphere, the *'waters above'* are not descriptive of merely clouds but a *'vapor canopy'* (Morris, 58ff; see below, The Canopy Theory). And yes, the Bible does speak of our atmosphere as *'firmament':* *'let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens'* (Gen 1:20). But the creation story continues, *'Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night,"'* (Gen 1:14); if the Lord places the sun, moon and stars *'in the firmament'* then some believe it must be higher and greater than our atmosphere alone.

"I am unable to accept the opinion that the waters above the expanse refer to the clouds, for this position does not do justice to the language of the text which states that these waters are above the expanse." [Young, 90; emphasis his]

"Many see [the firmament] as merely figurative language for terrestrial clouds or a water canopy between the earth and the sun. Rather, it actually should be taken at face value to mean 'a large body of water, a sea, above a solid firmament, which firmament serves as a roof to the universe and under which firmament are the sun, moon and stars.'" [Currid, 64; quoting P. H. Seely, *The Firmament and the Water Above, Part 2: The Meaning of "The*

Water Above the Firmament” in Gen 1:6-8,’ Westminster Theological Journal 54, 1992]

Ken Ham summarizes ‘firmament’ as follows: “(1) The ‘expanse’ is outer space, where the sun, moon, and stars are. (2) The ‘waters above the expanse’ are at the outer boundary of the universe. (3) The phrase ‘across the face of expanse of the heavens’ means in the atmosphere where birds fly. (4) The waters ‘under the expanse’ are the waters covering the surface of the earth.... ***And as difficult as it is for our finite minds to grasp, it seems that the waters above the firmament are at the outer edge of outer space. In fact, Psalm 148:3-4 says that water is still above the heavens where the sun, moon and stars are.***” [Ham, 42f] *‘Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all you stars of light! Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, and you waters above the heavens!’* (Ps 148:3, 4)

THE ‘CANOPY THEORY’ — From this division of waters has come what is known as the ‘*canopy theory*’ which states there was a massive canopy of either water vapor, water (liquid) or ice extending high up into the atmosphere and covering the entire planet. Advocates also believe this is part of the source for the waters during the flood of Noah (*‘on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened’* Gen 7:11). Other reasons to support this theory is that after the flood we see the life span of mankind greatly decrease, the argument being that before the flood harmful radiation from outer space was filtered; a canopy would provide a nearly uniform earth temperature and serve as a greenhouse. The original theory (there have since been several adaptations of the original) came from Dr. Henry Morris and Dr. John Whitcomb’s groundbreaking book *‘The Genesis Flood’* (1961; see also Henry Morris, *‘Genesis’*, pp. 58-61). Another work which helped it gain popularity was Dr. Joseph Dillow’s book *‘The Waters Above: Earth’s Pre-Flood Vapor Canopy’* (1982). But according to Ken Ham (*‘Creation to Babel’*, 2021, pp. 275-287) the canopy models have faded to such an extent that most researchers and apologists have abandoned the various models. Douglas Kelly:

“But the text of Genesis does not specifically state the formation of a canopy of water vapor in the firmament on the second day, and more recent work by scientists who believe in both creation and flood suggests a rather different explanation of ‘waters above the expanse.’ This newer model for explaining the position of the primeval waters and the possible mechanics of the great Flood a few thousand years later seems to avoid some of the problems of the canopy hypothesis.” [Kelly, 237]

Douglas Kelly notes the following authors if one wishes to do further research: Robert L. Whitelaw, *‘The Fountains of the Great Deep and the Windows of Heaven: A Look at the Canopy Theory, and a Better Alternative’* in *‘Science at the Crossroads: 1983 National Creation Conference Proceedings* [Minneapolis MN; 1983], and Walter T. Brown, *‘In the Beginning: Compelling Evidence for Creation and the Flood’* [Sixth General Edition: Center for Scientific Creation: Phoenix AZ, 1995]. Ken Ham also gives a good synopsis of pros and cons for the theories (ref. cited above).

THE ANCIENT MYTHS — The ancient myths say that after the god Marduk (or another deity, depending upon the culture) had vanquished Tiamat, the goddess of the world-ocean depicted as a great and might sea monster, he divided her in the middle, one on top of the other. The upper half he formed the heavens and the lower half he made the earth. Other cultures had Anu, the sky god, and Enlil, god of the atmosphere (Sumerian religion); and Baal is identified as the ‘Rider of the Clouds’ (Ugaritic religion). Again, we understand this to be the remnants of a long-lost truth that evolved through the centuries, with similarities remaining from the actual creation. ***“Here it will***

suffice to note the opposition of the Torah to the entire mythological account.” [Cassuto, 32]

v. 7 – ‘And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament.’ — As in v. 3, the words of the divine fiat are repeated in the announcement that it had been executed. Since the divine command on the second day is more comprehensive than that of the first day (two words in the Hebrew, ‘*let there be light*,’ v. 3), modifications have been introduced which serves to explain the subject more clearly. The phrase, ‘*separating the waters from the waters*,’ (v. 6) is thus enlarged thus: ‘*separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament*.’

GOD IS THE SUBJECT OF ‘and separated,’ NOT THE FIRMAMENT — The subject is God and not, as some interpret, the firmament; see v. 4, ‘*and GOD separated the light from the darkness*.’ Furthermore, v. 6 does not say, ‘*Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters*.’ Rather the text says literally, ‘*and let it be a separator*,’ i.e., ‘*let it be the means that I shall use for the purpose of separating the waters from the waters*.’

‘And it was so.’ — At first sight this seems redundant, for we have already been told that ‘*God made the firmament, ...*’. But Rabbi Cassuto believes both to be necessary. By the rules of Hebrew Biblical narrative style, repeating the words of the divine command is required (‘*Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light*.’ in v. 3; ‘*Then God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, ... Thus God made the firmament*’ in v. 6, 7). But the difference between the two separations (light and darkness in v. 3; the waters in vv. 6-8) is that the first is temporal, relating to time, and was due to recur at regular intervals. But the second separation (of the waters) is spatial, relating to space or occupying space, and was destined to remain unchanged forever. “This then is the meaning of the expression ‘*and it was so*’ [kēn] throughout the section: ‘*and it was FIRM*’ [which is the root signification of kēn], like an established thing; ‘*so it came to pass, and so it has remained for all time*.’” [Cassuto, 33f]

v. 8 – ‘And God called the firmament Heaven.’ — For the third time God names His creation; here the expanse is termed ‘*sky, heaven*,’ the same word translated ‘*heaven*’ in v. 1.

THE LXX ADDS ‘And God saw that it was good’ — Rabbi Cassuto says many scholars agree with the addition of these words since this formula is found in the account of each of the other days, but he explains we must not expect word-for-word repetition of an unvarying formula on every occasion. As far as our verse is concerned, it is absent because it is not appropriate at this state in as much as the work of the water had not yet been completed. The situation was not yet ‘*good*’ for if it had been ‘*good*’ there would have been no necessity for another separation on the third day. For the same reason it is not stated here that God gave a name to the sea just as He had named the heavens. The lower waters had not yet reached their final distribution and were still covering everything under the heavens. (One author added, ‘*Even God did not say that Mondays are good!*’)

‘And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.’ — Same concluding formula as found in v. 5.