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# The Book of Beginnings – Studies in Genesis

LESSON XI : GENESIS 1:20-23 – PARAGRAPH FIVE: THE FIFTH DAY

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*“All the necessities for living creatures were present on the earth by this time: light, air, water, soil, chemicals, plants, fruits, and so forth. One deficiency yet remained – the earth was still ‘void’ of inhabitants. However, God had ‘formed it to be inhabited’ (Isa 45:18); and the fifth and sixth days were to be devoted to this final work of creation.” [Morris, 68]*

*‘But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?’ (Job 12:7-10)*

## **The Fifth Day:**

*‘<sup>20</sup> Then God said, “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens.” <sup>21</sup> So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup> And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” <sup>23</sup> So the evening and the morning were the fifth day.’ (Gen 1:20-23 NKJV)*

Rabbi Cassuto’s translation:

**v. 20 – And God said,**

***“Let the waters swarm / with swarming things, living creatures,  
and let flying creatures fly above the earth / in front of the firmament of the heavens.”***

**v. 21 – So God created / the great sea monsters**

***and every living creature that moves, / with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds,  
and every winged creature according to its kind.***

***And God saw that it was good.***

**v. 22 – And God blessed them, saying,**

***“Be fruitful and multiply / and fill the waters in the seas,  
and let the flying creatures multiply on earth.”***

**v. 23 – And there was evening and there was morning, / a fifth day.**

**v. 20 – ‘And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarming things,’** — On the fifth day were created the living creatures existing in the two parts of the universe that were created on the second and third days, namely, the heavens and the seas. *‘Let the waters SWARM [yish<sup>o</sup>r<sup>o</sup>tsû] with SWARMING THINGS [sherets] ...’* is a play on words, as in v. 11 where it literally says, *‘let the earth vegetate [tadshê] vegetation [deshe’]*. **The primary significance of the stem for ‘swarm’ is ‘movement,’ with a specific reference to the abundant, swift movement of many creatures who jostle one another as they proceed criss-cross in all possible directions.** “God willed that into the midst of the waste and inanimate waters, from one end of the sea to the other, there should now

enter a living spirit, and that there should be born in their midst moving, animate beings, subject to no limitation of numbers or intermission of movement.” [Cassuto, 48] (An interesting note about the word *SWARM* [yish<sup>ê</sup>r<sup>ê</sup>tsû], the same word is used of the multiplication of the children of Israel in Egypt, ‘*But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them.* – Exod 1:7. A form of the same word is used to describe the plague of the frogs in Egypt, ‘*Their land swarmed with frogs, even in the chambers of their kings.*’ – Ps 105:30.) Note some translations could be misunderstood when it translates this as, ‘*And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly...*’ which an evolutionist could take as life coming from the oceans as they mistakenly believe.

**CREATURES SMALL AND LARGE** — As a rule, the stem of ‘*swarm, swarming things*’ is used of small or tiny creatures such as insects, mice, and fish; but here in the command of God it also refers to large creatures; see v. 21. All creatures are all equally small to God but He uses human phraseology and distinguishes between the big and small creatures; similar to v. 16 where He speaks of the ‘*greater*’ and ‘*lesser*’ light.

**‘living creatures,’** — ‘*Living creatures*’ [nephesh chayyāh, literally ‘*breath of life, being of life*’] is a comprehensive term that is used here of the water creatures, of land animals in v. 24, of birds and land animals in 9:10, and of man and animals in 9:16; in other words, of all animate creation in which there is ‘*the breath of life.*’ “***But on the whole an entirely new type of being has come into existence, creatures that breathe and are animated and have power of their own volition to go from place to place. To give existence to such is the peculiar prerogative of God and is a monumental, epoch-making achievement that deserves to be described by the verb ‘and he created’ as the opening verse does.***” [Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, vol 1, 80f] Man is therefore not unique in ‘*having a soul*’ since the exact same phrase is used of each. Although its most basic meaning is ‘*that which breathes*’ according to the BDB Hebrew Lexicon, the ‘*soul*’ [nephesh] is regarded as having the ‘*principle of consciousness*’ or the ‘*entity of conscious life which would henceforth be an integral part of every animate being, including man*’ [Morris]. Therefore according to this Biblical viewpoint plants have no life, at least not in the same sense as animals and mankind.

**‘and let flying creatures fly’** — Another play on words, ‘*and let the FLYING CREATURES* [‘ôp] *FLY* [y<sup>ê</sup> ‘ôfêp] *above the earth...*’. The root of these two words also connotes movement resembling and corresponding to ‘*swarming,*’ the term used of living creatures inhabiting the water. The flying creatures fly about hither and thither, in all directions. The collective noun ‘*flying creatures*’ is not limited to birds and fowls only but signifies all creatures that fly about in the air; cp. Lev 11:19f; e.g., flying mammals such as bats, and flying reptiles such as the pterodactyls.

**‘above the earth’** — Literally, ‘*upon the earth,*’ but the sense is correctly given in our translations, ‘*above the earth.*’

**‘in front of the firmament of the heavens.’** — Literally, ‘*on the face of*’ the firmament. “It seems to reflect the impression that a person receives on looking upward: the creatures that fly above one’s head appear then to be set against the background of the sky – ‘*in front of the firmament of the heavens.*’” [Cassuto, 49]

**THE LXX ADDITION** — The LXX adds at the end of this verse, ‘*and it was so,*’ in an attempt to make this the same as many parallel verses. “But this tendency of the Greek translator, as well as of several modern exegetes, to achieve complete correspondence between the paragraphs is not justified. Having regard to the explanation we gave above of the meaning of the expression ‘*and it was so,*’ it could not be used here, because the sea monsters, the first kind of creation to be formed on the fifth day, have not survived in our time.” [Cassuto, 49] The inclusion of ‘*and it was so*’ would also disturb the sevenfold pattern we have already recognized. [Wenham, 1:23]

**v. 21 – ‘So God created’** — Animal life was not simply ‘*brought forth*’ from the earth or water as was true for plant life. The word Moses uses is not the word ‘*made*’ (‘*asah*, used in v. 7 of the firmament and in v. 16 of the sun, moon and stars) but the verb ‘*created*’ (bārā) which we last saw in v. 1, ‘*God created the heavens and the earth.*’ What Moses is saying is that on the first four days of creation the Lord worked with the physical elements of the universe that were created on the first day, but here He performs His second act of true creation (as He does one other time in the creation story, 1:27; this word is also used in 2:3, 4a). Here it designates three varieties of creatures, namely, the great sea monsters, every living thing that moves about and every winged fowl.

**‘the great sea monsters’** — Throughout the whole section only the general categories of plants and animals are mentioned but not the separate species, with this one exception: ‘*the great sea monsters.*’ The Lord must have had a reason for making this exception. These ‘*great sea monsters*’ are a mystery and their identity varies greatly among the translations and the commentators; e.g., the different translations handle this Hebrew word ‘*tannînim*’ in this verse as follows:

- ‘*great whales*’ (Geneva, KJV, Wycliffe, 21<sup>st</sup> Century KJV, Douay-Rheims 1899)
- ‘*great sea creatures*’ (ESV, NKJV, NASB, NET, NIV, Lexham English Bible, Modern English Version)
- ‘*large sea-creatures*’ (Christian Standard Bible, Holman Christian Standard Bible, Evangelical Heritage Version, God’s Word Translation)
- ‘*great sea-monsters*’ (ASV, RSV, NRSV, Amplified, Good News Translation)
- ‘*giant sea monsters*’ (Contemporary English Version, Darby, Legacy Standard Bible)
- ‘*great monsters*’ (YLT)
- ‘*great dragons*’ (Jubilee Bible 2000)
- ‘*great sea animals*’ (Common English Bible, Living Bible)
- ‘*large sea animals*’ (Easy-to-Read Version, Expanded Bible, New Century Version)

The same word is used of Aaron’s rod which became a ‘*serpent*’ in Exod 7:9. It is used when the Lord speaks against Pharaoh king of Egypt, calling him ‘*the great “tannînim” that lies in the midst of his rivers;*’ and is variously translated ‘*dragon,*’ ‘*monster,*’ or ‘*crocodile.*’ It is used in Jer 51:34 to describe Nebuchadrezzar as ‘*swallowing me up like a “tannîn”*’ which is again variously translated either ‘*dragon*’ or ‘*monster.*’ The commentators likewise vary as to what these creatures are (or were). ***In general all that may be said is that they are (or were) large creatures of the water and were created by God.*** Ocean dwelling dinosaurs could / would be included in this category.

**A POLEMIC AGAINST ‘SEA MONSTERS’ IN PAGAN MYTHS?** — Moses, again, it would seem, intended to sound a protest to certain concepts common not just among the pagans but even among the Israelites. ***“The reference to a specific animal must have a specific purpose. It is well***

known that in Canaanite literature a dragon or a serpent was the enemy of the main fertility god Baal. The Hebrew narrative may be a polemic against that myth. In the Bible, Yahweh creates the ‘great sea creatures’, and they are not in rebellion against him. Yahweh is sovereign.”

[Currid, 78] Wenham admits its use of the ‘sea monsters’ of Canaanite myths in Isa 27:1; 51:9; Ps 74:13 and Job 7:12. [Wenham, 1:24] Cassuto says the following:

**“In Egypt, in Mesopotamia, in the land of Canaan and in the countries of the East generally, all sorts of legends used to be recounted about the battles of the great gods against the sea dragon and similar monsters....** In Isa. xxvii 1, these monsters, bearing the very same names as occur in Canaanite poetry, are mentioned as symbols of the principle of evil, which God will ultimately uproot from the world: *‘In that day the Lord with His hard and great and strong sword will punish LEVIATHAN THE FLEEING SERPENT, LEVIATHAN THE TWISTING SERPENT, and He will slay the DRAGON that is in the sea.’* ... [T]he Torah is entirely opposed to these myths. It voices its protest in its own quiet manner, relating: *‘So God created the great sea monsters.’ It is as though the Torah said, in effect: ‘Far be it from any one to suppose that the sea monsters were mythological beings opposed to God or in revolt against Him; they were as natural as the rest of the creatures, and were formed in their proper time and in their proper place by the word of the Creator, in order that they might fulfil His will like the other created beings.’*

Similarly it is stated in Psa. cvlviii 7: ‘Praise the Lord from the earth, YOU SEA MONSTERS AND ALL DEEPS.’ *The poet invites all created forms of life to praise the Lord, and among the terrestrial creatures, beneath the heavens, he invites, first and foremost, the sea monsters and the deeps specifically.*” [Cassuto, 50f]

**‘and every living creature that moves,’** — That is, in other words, the ‘swarms’ mentioned in v. 20.

**‘with which the waters swarmed,’** — This is past tense which according to Cassuto gives the sense of, ‘with which they swarmed from that moment onward in obedience to the command in v. 20.’

**‘according to their kinds, and every winged creature according to its kind.’** — “Like the various plants, the actual biochemical reproductive systems of the animals were programmed to assure the fixity of the kinds. Physically and chemically, animals are similar to plants. Modern genetics has shown that all replicating systems function in the framework of the marvelous information programmed in the DNA molecule. The DNA for each kind is programmed to allow for wide individual variations within the kind, but not beyond the structure of the kind itself.” [Morris, 70]

**‘And God saw that it was good.’** — Another allusion to the subject of the sea monsters; of them, too, it is possible to say: *‘that it was good.’* In later Judaism animals are divided between ceremonially ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ with respect to their suitability for food and sacrifice (e.g., Lev 11:13-23; Deut 14:11-20). But God originally judged all creatures to be ‘good’ because they contributed to His reversing the condition of the empty earth. It is only after the fall that the Lord makes a distinction between the ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ in the created order (7:2, 8; 8:20). Many also teach that those food restrictions were not primarily for hygienic purposes but to distinguish the people of God from their neighbors as a ‘holy’ (‘separated’) nation (Lev 11:44, 45).

**v. 22 – ‘And God blessed them,’** — The reference is to the swarming sea creatures, as is obvious by the continuation of the sentence: *‘and fill the waters in the sea.’* This blessing indicates that the creatures are in a favored position before the Lord. **Note the animal world is valued by**

*God and is eventually placed under the care-taking of humans. This is the first time the additional divine word takes the form of a blessing instead of a naming and is repeated in 1:28; 2:3 and 5:2.*

**THE BLESSING OF GOD IN GENESIS** — *“The blessing of God is one of the great unifying themes of Genesis. God blesses animals (1:22), mankind (1:28), the Sabbath (2:3), Adam (5:2), Noah (9:1), and frequently the patriarchs (12:3; 17:16, 20, etc.). God’s blessing is most obviously visible in the gift of children, as this is often coupled with ‘being fruitful and multiplying.’ Genesis may be described as the story of the fulfillment of the divine promises of blessing. The earth is filled with animals and man and filled a second time after the flood. The patriarch, despite initial infertility, have many children and in spite of many foolish acts enjoy great prosperity. But all aspects of life can express this blessing: crops, family, and nation (Deut 28:1-14). **Where modern man talks of success, OT man talked of blessing. Though God’s blessing can be simply evident in a man’s happy and successful life (e.g., 24:35), it is always regarded as the result of a divine promise of blessing.**” [Wenham, 1:24] **“God had already given the creatures power to reproduce by virtue of his creative word; thus the ‘blessing’ is an expression of God’s desire for them to do so, showing his favor toward them. The blessing, it is reasoned, does not enable fertility for Noah (9:1) and Jacob (35:9-12) as though they did not have it before; rather it urges their practice of procreation. Yet we think that since in the OT divine blessing is predominately fertility and prosperity, it makes little difference if the blessing is merely statement or not since the power comes from the Lord ultimately. Both are in mind. It is best to understand ‘blessing’ as a divine enablement at creation that is enjoyed by all as a creation ordinance for animal and people in general. Subsequently divine blessing (e.g., Noah or Jacob) is an assurance (i.e., statement) that this enablement will come to pass.**” [Mathews, 1:158]*

**‘saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters,”** — The blessing mentioned in this verse is purely one of fertility and increase: *‘be fruitful and multiply and fill...’*. Many more expressions of blessing, linked with the idea of fertility and an abundance of offspring, occur in the book of Genesis: 9:1; 17:16, 20; 22:17; 24:60; 26:3, 4; 28:3; 35:9-11; 48:3, 4; 49:25. **Note this is in direct opposition to the pagan materialism of our declining Western society which sees reproductive increase as a curse rather than a blessing. This is also the first time in the creation narrative that the Lord speaks to somebody, and that first somebody was not man but rather to the fish and fowl.**

**‘in the seas,’** — Apparently the intention here is to inform us that one of these two portions of the world (i.e., the one containing the seas) would be the special domain of the fish and other aquatic creatures, and that the air of the second portion (the air above the earth) would be the exclusive sphere of the flying creatures.

**‘and let the flying creatures multiply’** — Note the aerial creatures were not blessed with the same exceeding fertility as the fish, hence in their case only the term *‘multiply’* is used.

**‘upon the earth.’”** — Although the winged creatures fly about *‘in front of the heavens,’* their nests are made, and their young are hatched, upon the ground, or upon the trees, which are planted in the ground.

**v. 23 – ‘And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.’** — Same concluding formula as the previous days of creation.