

Temple Building

³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

⁴ And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.

⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters."

⁷ And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so.

⁸ And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so.

¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so.

¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years,

¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so.

¹⁶ And God made the two great lights-- the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night-- and the stars.

¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth,

¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens."

²¹ So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²² And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."

²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds-- livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so.

²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

²⁹ And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.

³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Genesis 1:3-2:3

Ancient Liturgy

HERODOTUS WAS AN ANCIENT Greek historian who lived between 484–425 B.C. He might seem a strange way to begin a sermon surveying Genesis 1, but give the following quote a listen.

And this is their method of sacrifice to the aforesaid gods: when about to sacrifice, they do not build altars or kindle fire, employ libations, or music, or fillets, or barley meal: when a man wishes to sacrifice to one of the gods, he leads a beast to an open space and then, wearing a wreath on his tiara, of myrtle usually, calls on the god. To pray for blessings for himself alone is not lawful for the sacrificer; rather, he prays that the king and all the Persians be well; for he reckons himself among them. He then cuts the victim limb from limb into portions, and, after boiling the flesh, spreads the softest grass, trefoil usually, and places all of it on this. When he has so arranged it, a Magus comes near and chants over it the song of the birth of the gods, as the Persian tradition relates it; for no sacrifice can be offered without a Magus. Then after a little while the sacrificer carries away the flesh and uses it as he pleases.

(Herodotus, *Histories* 132).

Before finally deciding on the direction for this sermon, I had over 60 pages of notes and at least four partially complete manuscripts. It has been difficult for me to figure out how to preach what is before us today in terms of a coherent whole, which is what I'm going to attempt. This is partly because our story has created so much controversy and passion in so many people. It used to be that the central concern of our passage was theological. But for a couple hundred years at least, certain parts of the church have increasingly made it about science. Charles Hummel writes, "Since the time of Galileo, science has replaced theology on the throne of Western thought. It has won this position through many conflicts in which biblical Christianity found itself on the defensive." But he says, "Often failure to define terms and identify basic issues has sparked unnecessary controversy."¹

Let's assume he's right for the moment. What would be purpose of the text if not science?² As I said, it is theological. But it is a specific kind of theology. In fact, there may be more than one theological purpose here (*specifically apologetics/polemics and eschatology*), but we're going to focus on the most immediate, explicit, obvious (to the ancient reader) purpose today. What I will say this morning is something many people have never heard anyone in all the modern scientific debates ever say a single thing about. So I thought that in a strange way, perhaps the quote from Herodotus can help get us back to the purpose and function of Genesis 1 by entering into the world of a pre-scientific person. You ask, how could that be? What does his comment have to do with anything?

Herodotus was explaining how, during the course of public sacrifices in Persia, a *liturgy* took place. This liturgy involved chanting the songs of the birth of the gods. These birth-songs are what we call *origin stories* or *myths*. Every culture on earth has them, and they are eerily similar in many respects: chaos waters, primeval hills, sacred trees, the first people, serpents, wisdom, laws, and so on. But "myth" is one of those words that you don't really want to use anymore, because it is associated with things like "lies" and "untruths" and "deception" and "non-history" and "inaccuracy" and "make-believe." If you say that the Bible is a *myth*,

¹ Charles Hummel, *The Galileo Connection: Resolving Conflicts between Science & the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 8.

² I realize that some will think I'm creating a false choice: either theology or science. This, however, is incorrect, for a couple of related reasons. First, the "science" it does give is ancient science, not modern science. Second, ancient science is not after physical precision, but rather metaphysical explanations. That is, we describe science on purely naturalistic and material terms: gravity, molecules, distance between objects, orbits, and so on. Their science was inextricably linked to the supernatural and religious elements of life: gods, purpose, function, temples, worship, and so on. It is difficult for us to understand this, which is part of the reason for this sermon today. I want to introduce you to this religious orientation.

most people will immediately think that you mean it is a fairy-tale, Walt Disney or Superman.

However, as Francis Schaeffer says, “More and more we are finding that mythology in general, though greatly contorted, very often has some historic base.”³ This is something I’m not sure I can impress upon you strongly enough. Here’s an example to help. The city of **Troy** is one of the mythical cities in poems of **Homer**. For thousands of years some people said everything in those stories was made up fantasy, including the places. *The Odyssey* might as well have been Star Wars, and Troy might as well have been Tatooine. Everyone knows the Greek poets were just spinning a yarn. Then, in the 1860s, taking Homer at his word, someone dug it up. Troy was a real place! The myth became historical geography.

Scholars have sought for decades to come to a consensus on a definition of myth. I believe the best definition out there may be the simplest. A myth is simply a story of origins. This says nothing of the stories’ historical veracity one way or the other. Any single story could be historically true or not true. Neither can we imply anything from the way the story is told. They may tell it with colorful poetic language or with personification of animals or with deification of elements and gods or with historical events taken thematically and non-sequentially or with all historical events in a grand historic-narrative. It is simply up to the person and culture telling the story. Some take these things as fantasy, some as metaphor, some literally.

C. S. Lewis referred to the Bible as the “true myth.” In fact, it was when he discovered this fact that he was converted to Christianity. He knew full well how similar its origin stories are to those of the world. But he came to recognize that it was telling the story in such a way as to present you with a choice. Either the God of the Bible is who he says he is and all the other stories are telling it wrong, or it is lying and can’t be trusted. Do you see then, how the myth for Lewis led him to consider the truth of God and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ? We think it strange the myth could do that for anyone, but it wasn’t strange for Lewis, not even slightly.

One of the most famous myths or origin stories was discovered in the library of Ashurbanipal in the 1800s. It is called the *Enuma Elish*. We looked briefly at this story when we discussed **Genesis 1:2**. The *Enuma Elish* is quite curious for our story today for a couple of reasons. First, this story is deliberately written on seven

³ Francis Schaeffer, “Genesis in Space and Time,” in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), p. 89.

tablets. Not one tablet, not twenty-nine tablets, *seven* tablets. I find this fascinating. There seems to be an overlap between this and the seven days of creation in Genesis 1. We'll see more of this overlap with neighboring peoples a little later.

Second, [this seventh tablet of creation was used as a ritual](#) and was recited as a liturgy during a ceremony or celebration. Scholars now think this was done on the [Babylonian new year](#). They would take their creation story and sing it in a liturgy. That now makes two different creation stories that became liturgies in two different places in the Ancient Near East (ANE). The story tells of the creation of the world, and of Marduk's triumph over Tiamat the chaos monster whose name means "the deep." This tells how Marduk became king of the gods. The story concludes with fifty names of Marduk which are given as an expression of praise. Reciting Marduk's victory and enthronement from the seventh tablet shows the ancient association the number seven with religion and ritual.

Let's now add to this how we know from the Rabbis that in Israel, from at least the time between the testaments (the Second Temple period), the priests and chiefs who met at the time sacrifices were being offered in Jerusalem, customarily read portions from the account of creation in Genesis, and on the sixth day they sang "thus the heavens and earth were completed" from [Gen 2:1](#).⁴ Here is yet another connection between the creation story and the rituals in the temple, only this time, it hits much closer to home. It seems that the "morning and evening" formula as well as the "it was good" formula was seen as a kind of liturgical refrain, sort of like "his steadfast love endures forever" in Ps. 136, which itself curiously begins with several verses recalling creation and was also used in temple worship.

What I hope to show you today is how Genesis 1 functions as a kind of liturgy on several levels.⁵ [Its chief function is to help God's people engage in proper](#)

⁴ [Moshe Weinfeld](#), "Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord—The Problem of the Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1:1-2:3," in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Henrie Cazelles*, ed. A. Caquot and M. Delcor, 501-512 (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1981); 510. Cited in [Morrow](#), p. 3 (see note 4 for full citation).

⁵ Is the genre of Genesis 1 liturgy? Some have argued as much. See for example, [Jeff Morrow](#), "Creation as Temple-Building and Work as Liturgy in Genesis 1-3," *The Journal of the Orthodox Center for the Advancement of Biblical Studies*, Vol 2:1 (2009): 1-13. <http://ocabs.org/journal/index.php/jocabs/article/viewFile/43/18>. I use this article and its references throughout the sermon. The problem of genre of this chapter is notorious and of such a scope that I do not wish to get into it here. It has elements of historic narrative, poetry, myth, and more, but at the same time it does not seem to equate one-to-one with any of them. Bruce Waltke has an excellent article which denies the genre is "cultic liturgy" but it is still worth reading as it explores the question of genre. [Bruce Waltke](#), "The Literary Genre of Genesis Chapter 1," http://www.hopeportland.org/site_content/attachments/0001/4964/The_Literary_Genre_of_Genesis_Chapter_One.pdf. This is an expanded version of what was originally an excursus in his *Genesis: A commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 73-78.

worship of the True God, primarily by helping them understand the kind of God they are worshipping better and the place in which they are worshipping him. **First, what is liturgy?** A lot of Protestants really don't like that word, because they think of Rome. However, the word comes from two Greek words meaning "public" (*leitōs*) "working" (*ergos*). In secular Greek it came to mean the public service of the worship of the gods (*leitourgia*). Throughout the Bible, especially the book of Hebrews, it refers to the public ministry of the priests and even angels who minister around the throne of the one true God (**Heb 1:7, 14; 8:2, 6; 9:21; 10:11**; curiously, some have argued that the book of Hebrews is itself a kind of liturgy). Everyone has a liturgy, the question is whether it is good or bad, poorly done or well done, biblical or not biblical.

Patterns

The idea that Genesis 1 could be a liturgy seems very strange to us. So the way I'm going to start this is by calling to our attention how this chapter is built around the idea of **patterns**. Liturgies are all about patterns. Our own church liturgy follows a **dialogical pattern**. All that means is that it shifts from God speaking to us speaking, back and forth like a **dialogue**. It also follows the **pattern of law-gospel**. The first half of the bulletin is built upon law: we read the law, we confess our sins, we pray for repentance, we hear a declaration of pardon. The second half is built around gospel: we sing songs of praise, we read the gospel, we take the Lord's supper. So there are multiple levels of pattern in it.

Very often, my own sermons are themselves mini-liturgies in that they too follow a kind of law-gospel paradigm inside the overall liturgy. They show you what God requires. They give you the good news. There are other patterns. God always has the first and the last word in our liturgy. He calls us to worship and he dismisses us. Our liturgy is full of praise, that is its main purpose. All of the elements are given to help us do that and they do it in a pre-established order. So our liturgy is full of pattern.

In my opinion, Genesis 1 is the most profoundly patterned piece of religious literature ever penned. And it is deeply *religious* in its orientation. We can all see this on the most obvious level in English. It repeats words and phrases over and over. **Announcement:** "And God said ..." **Command:** "Let there be ..." **Fulfillment:** "It was so." **Execution:** "light" or "expanse" etc. **Approval:** "God saw/it was good."

Naming: “God called ...” Numbering/Order: “evening and morning, day ____.”⁶
 These are the most easily recognizable patterns, and there are seven of them.

The announcement formula (Divine Speech)	“And God said”	Ten times <u>Seven</u> (7x1) groups	(Gen. 1:3; 6; 1:9; 1:11; 1:14, 1:20; 1:24; 1:26, 28, 29).
The order formula	“Let there be . . .”	Eight times grouped into seven	(Gen. 1:3; 1:6, 9; 1:11; 1:14; 1:20; 1:24; 1:26).
The fulfillment formula	“And it was so”	<u>Seven</u> times	(Gen. 1:3; 1:7; 1:9; 1:11; 1:15; 1:24; 1:30)
The execution formula	“And God made”	<u>Seven</u> times	(Gen. 1:4; 1:7; 1:12; 1:16; 1:21; 1:25; 1:27).
The approval formula	“God saw that it was good”	<u>Seven</u> times	(Gen. 1:4; 1:10; 1:12; 1:18; 1:21; 1:25; 1:31).
The naming/blessing Formula	“God called” “God blessed”	<u>Seven</u> times	(Gen. 1:5x2; 1:8; 1:10x2; 1:22; 1:28).
Seven days affirmed	“evening and morning, day ____.”	<u>Seven</u> days	(Gen. 1:5; 1:8; 1:13; 1:19; 1:23; 1:31; 2:2).

But this is just the beginning. The way this story is written is almost beyond my comprehension. I know of nothing else like it. Here’s a list of other sevens that appear in **Genesis 1:1-2:3** according to one scholar.⁷

- **Genesis 1:1** contains seven words.
- **Genesis 1:2** contains fourteen words (7x2).
- God (*elohim*) occurs thirty-five times (7x5).
- Earth occurs twenty-one times (7x3).
- Heavens/firmament occurs twenty-one times (7x3).
- After the introductory verse, there are seven natural paragraphs.
- There are seven divine fiats.
- “Light” and “day” are found seven times in the first paragraph.
- “Light” occurs seven times in the fourth paragraph.
- Water is mentioned seven times in the course of paragraphs two and three.
- “Alive” or “living” (*hayya*) occurs seven times in the fifth and sixth paragraphs.
- “It was good” appears seven times with emphasis on the seventh (“very good”).
- The seventh paragraph which deals with the seventh day contains three sentences (three for emphasis). Each consists of seven words and contains in the middle the expression *the seventh day*.
- The words of the seventh paragraph total thirty-five (7x5).

⁶ Many scholars have followed this. See for example **Gordon J. Wenham**, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 17.

⁷ **U. Cassuto**, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part I: From Adam to Noah: Genesis I–VI*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961 [1944]), 12–13.

Two scholars sum this up. “The number seven dominates this opening chapter in a strange way.”⁸ And, “To suppose that all this is a mere coincidence is not possible.” You see, it isn’t just “seven days” that you find in this chapter. Seven is clearly a symbolic number used throughout the chapter in many different ways on several different levels. There is something more than just a seven day week going on in this text. We have to come to grips with why this would be, and I think the place to start is with worship. This is the Bible after all.

Temple

Moses and Solomon

So how would this relate to worship or even a worship service? There are several ways it does this. First, consider Moses and Solomon building their respective sanctuaries. First we’ll look at Moses.

- There are **seven** lamps on the Lampstand.
- Priests are ordained for **seven** days.
- Moses originally received the instructions for building the tabernacle in the form of **seven** “the Lord spoke/said to Moses” formulas.⁹
- The materials needed for the construction of the Tabernacle were grouped in **seven** categories (metals, dyed yarns, fabrics, timber, oil, spices, and gems).
- The tabernacle itself is a replica of heaven and earth from Genesis 1-2.¹⁰
- Moses obeyed “just as the Lord commanded” **seven** times (Ex 39:1; 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31).
- After concluding the work, it repeats God from day 7 saying, “Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was completed” (29:32; see Gen 2:1).
- After this, Moses “saw” all the work, and “behold, they had done it ... so Moses blessed them” (39:43). This is the same as God “seeing” his work and blessing it (Gen 1:31, 2:3).
- In **Exodus 40** it recaps all that Moses has made in seven summaries, which perfectly correspond to the days of creation.

⁸ Wenham, 6.

⁹ Ex 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12. These and the following are pointed out in Ex 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12. These are pointed out in Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), *Exodus*, 156ff.

¹⁰ See my sermon “Building the Tabernacle of God” on Exodus 35:1-40:33.

Genesis 1		Exodus 40
INTRO	"In the beginning God created"	"Moses did according to all the LORD commanded"
Formula 1	Space (separate light darkness)	Frame and covering (separation)
Formula 2	Sky and Sea (separation)	10 Commandments, poles, mercy seat, Ark, veil, screen (separation)
Formula 3	Land: vegetation, fruit, food	Table, bread
Formula 4	Space Filled: Sun, moon, stars	Lampstand, table, light
Formula 5	Sky Filled: Birds	Altar, burned incense (smoke fills the air)
Formula 6	Land Filled: Beasts, crawlings, Man	Veil, outside altar, burnt offering
Formula 7	REST	Laver, put water in it, washed

he Solomon story is similar.¹¹

- Solomon took **seven** years to build the temple and the seventh year is a Sabbath (1 **Kgs 6:38**).
- The temple dedication occurs during the Feast of Tabernacles which was a **seven** day festival and fell on the **seventh** month of the year (1 **Kgs 8:2, 65**; **Ezek 45:21–25**; 2 **Chr 7:9**; cf. **Lev 23:34**).
- Solomon’s dedication speech included **seven** petitions.
- Solomon was the one to build the temple rather than David because Solomon was “a man of rest” (1 **Chron 22:9**).

This deeply imbedded structure of sevens clearly demonstrates the relationship between the temple and Genesis 1. For this reason alone, many scholars have referred to Genesis 1 as a kind of temple liturgy of the seventh day.¹²

But there is more in Genesis 1 that relates to the temple. In fact, many have noticed that Genesis 1 is really the story of God forming and filling his temple. God becomes the prototype after which Moses and Solomon would later be patterned. To see this we will look at three things. We will look at **how other civilizations spoke** of similar things in order to compare and get a handle on the cultural context of Genesis 1. We will look at the interesting pattern that emerges in Genesis 1 that deliberately **plays off the *tohu wabohu***, the formless void of **Genesis 1:2**, and we will look at **who it is that is creating** and what he does at the end of his creation.

Build Me A House

First, let’s see a couple of comparisons in other ancient literature to see how what God is doing is building a temple. The first comes from Ugarit and the Canaanites north of Israel.

Quickly his house they built;

¹¹ The following are from **Jon D. Levenson**, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 142-145.

¹² See **Morrow**, notes 10, 11, and 12.

Quickly he constructed his palace.
 They went to Lebanon and its trees,
 To Siryon and its choicest cedars;
 Yes, Lebanon and its trees,
 Siryon and its choicest cedars.
 Fire was placed in the house,
 Flames in the palace.
 Lo,
 A **day** and a **second**,
 Fire burned in the house,
 Flames in the palace.
 A **third** and a **fourth** day,
 Fire burned in the house, flames in the palace.
 A **fifth** and a **sixth** day,
 Fire burned in the house,
 Flames in the midst of the palace.
 Look!
 On the **seventh day**
 The fire was removed from the house,
 The flames from the palace.
 The silver had turned into ingots;
 The gold had been changed into bricks!
 Valiant Baal rejoiced:
 ‘My house I have built of silver,
 My palace out of gold!’
 (KTU 1.4 vi 17-38)¹³

Notice how the “house” is being built in seven days and on the seventh day it is completed. This house is Baal’s temple.

You find the same thing in the Sumerian so-called *Gudea Cylinders*. In this story, the king makes a temple for the god. The temple has all kinds of parallels with Genesis 1 such as connections with fertility (**Gen 1:22**), wisdom (**Gen 2:9, 17**), a call to build (**Gen 1:1, 3, 6, 9, 11**), the divinely revealed plan (**Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14-15, 20, 24, 26**), pronouncement of blessing (**Gen 2:3**), laudatory descriptions (**Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25, 31**), the completion announcement (**Gen 1:31, 2:1**), and most of all, a

¹³ See notes 3-4 Chapter 3 in **Mark Smith**’s, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1*. By the way, this is the probable explanation for why the boy picking up sticks on the Sabbath was stoned. He wasn’t just picking up sticks. The context may very well have been some kind of kindling for fire in the tabernacle.

seven day dedication (**Gen 2:1-3**).¹⁴ In fact, you find this motif all over the ancient world. Kings and gods build houses or temples in seven days. This is not a rare occurrence.

Forming and Filling

The next thing to look at is the literary structure of **forming and filling** in the six creative days. Remember, the condition the earth is in (**Gen 1:2**) needs creative work to change the *tohu wabohu* or formless void. The earth is **without form**. It **needs forming**. It is **void, empty**. It **needs filling**. Genesis 1:2 actually sets the stage for the opposite state that the earth will be in after the work of completed. So this verse is vital for understanding the rest of the chapter. The creative days are thus **grouped literarily** around this concept of forming and filling the formless void.

It works like this. Days 1, 2, and 3 are days of “forming.” God forms **light** (**1:3**). God forms the **expanse** in the midst of the waters—the firmament (**1:6**). God forms the dry **land** (**1:9**) and it produces **vegetation** (**1:11**). Days 4, 5, and 6 are a perfect parallel to this. God formed the light on day 1 and says “**let there be lights**” to fill the sky on day 4 (**1:14**). God separated the firmament/dome from the waters below on day 2 and filled the firmament above with **birds** and the waters below with **living creatures** on day 5 (**1:20**). God formed the dry ground on day 3 and filled the dry ground with **creatures** on day 6 (**1:24**). God formed the vegetation on day 3 and put the **man** on the earth who he gave “**every plant yielding seed ... and every tree yielding seed ... for food**” (**1:29**).

Formless	CHAOS	Void/Empty
Day 1 {1:3-5} Light, Dark	HEAVENS	Day 4 {1:14-19} Sun, Moon, Stars
Day 2 {1:6-8} Water, Sky	WATER & SKY	Day 5 {1:20-23} Birds, Fish
Day 3 {1:9-13} Land, Vegetation	EARTH	Day 6 {1:24-31} Animals, Humans
Formed	COSMOS	Filled
	Day 7 {2:2-3} Rest	

¹⁴ Morrow, 7-9.

Part of this filling and forming is taken up with the word “[separate](#).” This is divine separation and it is an important temple/cultic/religious idea. Day 1, God [separates light and dark](#) (vs. 4). Day 2, he [separates the waters above from the waters below](#) (vs. 5). Day 3, this separation climaxes in a [gathering called a mikveh](#), which is a ritual bath or baptism in Judaism (vs. 10), and dry land appears. If when you hear this, the idea of dry land appearing from the gathered waters of the Jordan or the Red Sea comes to your mind, this is not an accident. Both stories are reminiscing on Genesis 1 and making a theological statement of the power of God to separate his people and deliver them and provide for them and be their king.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have an interesting statement in this regard in a place where creation and separation become names for God. He is “[The One Who Creates Earth and the Boundaries of its Divisions](#)” (1 QM 10:12). Another is in the comparison between heaven and earth and the temple. In Genesis 1, this separation and gathering creates the [three tiers of the universe](#): heaven, earth, and seas.¹⁵ You see this same word being used in the construction of the three divisions of the tabernacle. For example, in the holy of holies and the holy place in the tabernacle, Moses was commanded to put up the veil to “separate” the space (Ex 26:33). And you find this same kind of three-fold division in Noah’s ark, in the Temple, in Israel itself, and many other religious temple motifs (see my book *Waters of Creation*).

It gets more interesting. Leviticus 11 is a chapter that explains clean and unclean animals, which of course, are used in all kind of rituals for the temple and other aspects of religious life in Israel. The [separation of the animals](#) perfectly corresponds to the separation of the heavens, earth, and seas. You have the animals “[on the land](#)” (Lev 11:2), the animals “[that are in the waters](#)” (11:9-10); and “[the winged](#)” (11:13) and “[swarming](#)” things (11:20, 23). In the law, the separation is for clean and unclean (i.e. religious) purposes and man is given the task of separating because he is the image-bearer (Lev 11:47). In Genesis, it is for proper realms and God is doing it. But the point is the same. Both relate to the temple and worship.

We don’t have time to look at the temple itself as a replica of the heavens and earth ([maybe next time](#)). But the idea of three spaces of separation (courtyard, holy place, most holy place) corresponds to the earth, heavens, and highest heaven where God is. The filling and forming, separation and blessing takes place in the space of “sevens” in all three: the temple, the tabernacle, and the creation. In Genesis 1, it is 3 days followed by 3 days followed by 1 day. Someone has made the interesting observation that, though speculative, suggests that the seven-branched structure of

¹⁵ See [Mark Smith](#), *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1*, chapter 3.

the lamp stand with three lamps on either side of the main lamp in the middle may even represent this filling and forming idea.¹⁶

God the Priest-King

The last thing I want to look at is **who it is that is doing all of this work** in Genesis 1. It is obvious that it is God. What is not so obvious, to us (though it would have been perfectly clear 3,000 years ago), is that God is depicted as the Great Priest-King. How so?

First, God is doing a **lot of naming** in Genesis 1. He *calls* the light “day” (**Gen 1:5**). He *calls* the expanse “heaven” (8). He *calls* dry land “earth” (10). He *calls* the water “seas.” This is explicit and deliberate. Moses wants you to know that God is doing this. Why?

Throughout the Bible, God names people. “The LORD said to her, ‘... You shall call his name Ishmael” (**Gen 16:11**). “God said, ‘... you shall call his name Isaac” (**Gen 17:19**). “The LORD said to me, ‘Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz” (**Isa 8:3**). “The LORD said to him, ‘Call his name Jezreel” (**Hos 1:4**). “The LORD said, ‘Call his name Not My People” (**Hos 1:9**). “The Lord [said], ‘call his name Immanuel” (**Isa 7:14**). “You shall call his name Jesus” (**Matt 1:21**). The point of all of these names is to show people that God is sovereign in many ways.

Again, God often *renames* people to show that he is their personal King and that to him they owe allegiance. Thus, Abram becomes **Abraham** in the context of a covenant where God is the Suzerain (Great) King (**Gen 17**). Jacob becomes **Israel** immediately after Jacob wrestles with the Lord and soon blesses him (**Gen 32**). Simon becomes **Peter** in the context of Peter confessing Christ and Jesus establishing his church (**Matt 16**). Saul becomes **Paul** on the road to Damascus where Paul is converted and bows down to Jesus and Lord (**Acts 9**).

Throughout the ANE, a **thing is named by the one in charge**. So, many of the creation stories begin like this, “**When no god had come into being and no name had been invented for anything**” (*Ritual of Amun*),¹⁷ or “**When skies above were not yet named | Nor earth below pronounced by name**” (*Enuma Elish* 1.1-2). The point of the story will then be to see who will be the ultimate namer (such as Marduk and his 50 names). It is interesting that in the ancient world, these were all gods, so the relation between gods and naming was well known.

¹⁶ Smith, n. 19 ch. 3.

¹⁷ **John H. Walton**, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 88.

In Genesis 1, then, God—Elohim of elohim—names things to show his sovereignty and lordship over them. He is the king of the universe; no one else is.¹⁸ His creation has no sovereignty whatsoever over him or apart from him. Furthermore, his creation is not deified in any respect in this story. The naming then shows you who God is.

To see more of God as king, I want to take a brief look at the idea of rest. Rest is a significant feature of the end of the Genesis 1 creation story. In fact, it is the goal of the story. Rest belongs, properly speaking, to the king in the temple (which, of course, also belongs to the priests). We have seen, Solomon was a man of rest, that's why he could build the temple. Commenting on the heavens and earth Isaiah says, "Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?'" (Isa 66:1). Similarly the Psalm, "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool! ... For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: 'This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it'" (Ps 132:7-8, 13-14).

John Walton comments, "The role of the temple in the ancient world is not primarily a place for people to gather in worship like modern churches. It is a place for the deity—sacred space. It is his home, but more importantly his headquarters—the control room. When the deity rests in the temple it means that he is taking command, that he is mounting to his throne to assume his rightful place and his proper role."¹⁹

Throughout the ancient world we find divine rest achieved after conflict.²⁰ Many of the stories that parallel Genesis 1 depict the story as a conflict between the gods. Genesis 1 shows no conflict, because God is both sovereign and the sole creator. Nevertheless, the parallels end in divine rest (see *Enuma Elish* I.71-75). Divine rest is achieved after order-bringing acts of creation (see *Memphite Theology* Col. 60-61). Divine rest is achieved in the temple (see *EE* V.125-28). They even named their temples things like, "His dwelling place which will provide rest."

¹⁸ "In naming darkness God characterized it and expressed its nature and even indicated his control over it." N. H. Ridderbos, "Genesis 1.1 and 2," in *Studies on the Book of Genesis, Old Testament Studies* 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 239. Cited in Roberto Ouro, "The Earth of Genesis 1:2 Abiotic or Chaotic? Part II," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 37.1 (Spring, 1999): 40 [39-53]. http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Ouro-Gen1_2_Pt2_AUSS.pdf.

¹⁹ John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2009), 75.

²⁰ The following points are taken from John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 157-158.

Finally, rest is achieved, in part, by the gods' creation of people to work in their place and on their behalf. **We will come back to this point when we consider the creation of man in a couple of weeks.** Because in those stories, man becomes a slave of the gods. There is no hint of that here in Genesis 1. Though, we should know that slavery to the true God is freedom from the slavery presented everywhere else in the Bible to sin, the flesh, and the devil (i.e. the gods of this world).

The point is, when God takes his rest on Day 7, he is establishing himself as the King and Priest of the temple that he has built—the entire cosmos which he created out of nothing at some time in the past, but which he is now forming and filling to function as the place where he will now take control and oversee the affairs of all that is to come.

Conclusion

So what in the world difference does any of this make? Is this just a heady trip into irrelevant ideas from the past? Hardly. There are a couple of applications I would like to make here. First, as one commentator puts it, **“The effect of the liturgy [of Genesis 1] is to create an alternative world of ordered life, made possible by Yahweh’s powerful word and will.”**²¹

Often times, it feels like we live in an extremely disordered world, doesn't it? The recent massive flooding throughout Colorado is a case in point. This was, in a very biblical sense, a return to *tohu wabohu* in these regions of our state. This in turn often reminds us of the difficult circumstances that we all face throughout our lives. Genesis 3 will soon tell us about the effects of sin upon the world. But originally, God fashioned a world orderly, but not just orderly, orderly for religious purposes. It would declare his glory, as the Psalm says.

The point of coming together to worship in God's NT temple is the same as it was in the OT temple. It is the same as the effect that Genesis 1 is to have on you. Where God is, there is order, there is function, there is usefulness, there is naming, belonging with purpose, proper distinctions, and it is all capped off as being good, very good, because its God is very good.

The effect Genesis 1 is therefore to have on you is to know that, in Christ, who created all this as God's Word, order has been established, the temple built, proper distinctions remade, goodness constituted, his people have been called and named. Through Christ's coming in the flesh, all of these things have been “re” made. Civilization needs this word desperately. The church needs it too. We come

²¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Fortress Press, 2005), 153.

before this God to worship him for his creation and his new creation, to adore him for his mercy and grace, to be awe inspired by his power, and to bow the knee at his sovereignty. God sits enthroned above his creation, superior to it, in control of it all. He sits in his temple, as lord of the universe. To praise God is to enter into the new creation where things are turning into what they once were, but better. It is to have hope renewed, peace restored, order maintained in the chaos of the world.

Second, by making sense of this story in its context on its terms, you notice that any scientific questions become, at best, secondary. If you are going to defend Genesis 1 against modern science, because somehow you think they are incompatible, that is your right. But realize, that in all of this defense, you may very well lose sight of what we have just talked about, which was so plain to the original audience. I say this because I've seen this. It troubles me to no end that what we have spoken about here is not only ignored, but out right rejected by some who want to make science the point of the text. This beautiful picture of God enthroned above his temple, or Israel worshipping God through Genesis 1 as a liturgy is mocked and scorned, because somehow, this takes away from how God created? And science replaces theology as queen in the Church, not just in the culture. One does not necessarily have to do this. But beware. It is clear that there is a strong tendency not to talk about what we have talked about today, when our focus is on all things scientific. How strange it would be if in our zealous defenses to come to God's rescue against secularism and science, we miss or even ridicule the liturgical, religious, and theological purpose of the story.

Finally, returning to the first point, the effects of Genesis 1 must come out in how we are as people outside of the temple. You can choose to have both feet in this world in the way that Israel was doing in the desert when they left Egypt. They wanted to go back to the civilization, the gods, the order, the food, the animals, ... the slavery of Egypt. But God likens Egypt to Leviathan in other biblical creation stories ([Job 41](#); [Ps 74:14](#); [Isa 51:9](#)), the chaos monster of the Enuma Elish, in order to impress upon you what Egypt really is. It is a disordered world with no functional purpose in God's sight, for it is not the place where he has chosen to dwell. Their civilization, culture, religion, as high and lofty as it was, is worthless to God. Desiring the fruit of Egypt above the fruit of the Spirit is like going downstairs into a Longmont basement with 4 feet of mud, plopping yourself down, and staring at a TV that no longer works. It is a return to the chaos. Rather than this, go to the fully formed, fully filled temple of God in Christ. Find meaning and purpose here.

“Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent” (Ps 104:1).