

On Day 2 God Creates the Firmament

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And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

Genesis 1:6-8 (ESV)

God Creates the Firmament

On Day 2 God created the firmament. “Firmament” was used by the King James Bible translators to translate the Hebrew word *raqiya*. They transliterated the Latin word that Jerome used in the Vulgate. The ESV translates the word as

“expanse.” Others translate it as “vault.” The basic meaning of *raqiya* is “to spread out” or “to hammer out”.

God spoke the firmament into existence by the Word of His power. He created the breathable atmosphere. God needed to create an atmosphere with oxygen and carbon dioxide and other elements prior to the creation of the plants on Day 3. When you take a breath of oxygen, you can think back to the second day of the creation week in which God created the air and our atmosphere.

God created the firmament by the word of His power. He created it *ex nihilo*. The Hebrew verb used to describe this creative act is *asah* which means “to make.” In Genesis 1:1 a different word is used for God “creating” the heavens and the earth. In our discussion of Day 1 we mentioned that this verb for “create” is only and ever used to refer to a creative act of the divinity. But at times this word “create” can be a synonym with the word “made” that is used on Day 2: “And God made the expanse” (Genesis 1:7). We find them used as synonyms in Genesis 2:3: “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had *created* and *made*.”

When God made the firmament, He engaged in an act of fiat creation. He spoke and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast. He brought into existence an atmosphere that had not previously existed. This marvelous atmosphere continues

to provide space for us to live on planet earth. The chemical composition of the atmosphere is wonderful beyond what we can understand.

Moses' account of the creation of the sky is strikingly different from the fantastic myths found in the creation legends of ancient pagans. What a vast difference exists between the creation account in Genesis and mythical stories about creation. The *Enuma elish* explains the origin of the cosmogony of planet earth as follows:

The lord [Marduk] paused to view her dead body [Tiamat],
That he might divide the monster and do artful works.
He split her like a shellfish into two parts;
Half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky,
Pulled down the bar and posted guards.
He bade them to allow not her waters to escape.

Marduk supposedly creates the sky from one half of the corpse of the evil goddess Tiamat.

The Connotations of Rāqiyā

The Bible uses the word *raqiya* to refer to the spreading out of the earth at creation in Psalm 136:6: "To him who spread out the earth above the waters, for his steadfast love endures forever." In the book of Job the word is used for the spreading out of the sky: "Can you, like him, spread out the skies, hard as a cast metal mirror?" (Job 37:18). In Deuteronomy 28:23 the word is used to refer the sky as hammered

out bronze: “And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron.”

Gold, as a soft alloy, can be hammered exceedingly thin. Gold can be flattened and then spread out over wooden furniture. The Israelites hammered it thin to overlay temple furniture or to make gold leaf. In Isaiah 40:19 it is used to refer to overlaying something with gold: “An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold.” The word relates to the hammering out and spreading out of metals like gold in Exodus 39:3: “And they hammered out gold leaf, and cut it into threads to work into the blue and purple and the scarlet yarns, and into the fine twined linen, in skilled design.” So, the word “firmament” refers to something that is spread out and expanded by beating.

Why is the word *raqiya* used to describe the firmament that God created on the second day? The firmament looked like a transparent glass dome that arose from the horizons. It would remind an ancient of the inside of a golden bowl. R. Kent Hughes explains that Moses uses a word to describe the firmament that provides a “phenomenological description of the earth’s atmosphere as viewed from earth.” (Hughes, 2004, p. 28) The sky, from our perspective, looks like a transparent blue dome. The sky looks like an inverted bowl that has been hammered out. In ancient times they often made bowls of gold or silver. Just like a silver bowl would be hammered and spread out into a spherical shape, so too the sky looks like an upside-

down bowl—albeit a blue bowl. The earth’s atmosphere is a spherical envelope. Mark Vander Hart explains that the sky looks like a hammered-out bowl that is “inverted over the earth.” (VanderHart, 2007, p. 26) He adds: “This “upside-down bowl” looks as if it had been stamped out or stretched out over us.” (VanderHart, 2007, p. 26)

So, the firmament refers to the roof of the sky or our breathable atmosphere.

The Bible uses beautiful imagery to describe the firmament. In Job 37:18 the firmament is described as a “molten mirror.” The transparency of the sky is compared to that of a mirror. In Exodus 24:10 the firmament is pictured as a transparent sapphire. Sapphires are blue. The sky is blue. So, it is appropriate that the firmament is pictured as a transparent sapphire. After all, we can see through transparent space.

Sky & Space

I think that the word “firmament” can refer to both the sky and space. It constitutes the visible heavens which include both the sky and outer space. If the “waters above” refer to the clouds, then the firmament is the sky that exists between the surface of the planet and the clouds. But since the sun, moon, and stars are said to be created in the firmament, the word can also refer to space. The reality is that when you go outside and gaze up, you see not only the atmosphere (the sky where birds fly) but also the stars in space. If you look up at a bat flying across the evening

sky, you see it against both the earth's atmosphere and against the starry sky. It is no wonder that one word is used to describe both these realities.

And then God names the firmament on Day 2: "And God called the expanse Heaven" (Genesis 1:8a). He names the firmament "heaven." The word heaven has three uses in the Bible. Sometimes "heaven" refers to the sky, other times to the place where the sun, moon, and stars exist, and at other times to the Paradise of God.

The Bible speaks of Paradise as the third heaven. The word "heaven" is used to describe both the breathable atmosphere in which the birds fly (what we call the "sky"), the astral heavens or space where the sun, moon, and stars exist, or Paradise where God reigns and dwells with the angels and the church triumphant (Ezekiel 1:26). So, Scripture distinguishes between three heavens:

- (1) The atmospheric heavens, the region of the clouds, and the earth's air envelope—
- (2) The astral heavens, and
- (3) The heaven of heavens (I Kings 8:23,27). This is also called the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2).

In *Paradise Lost* (Book VII), John Milton uses poetry to describe the firmament:

Again, God said, Let there be Firmament
Amid the waters, and let it divide
The waters from the waters. And God made
The Firmament, expanse, of liquid pure,
Transparent, elemental air, diffus'd

In circuit to the uttermost convex
Of this great Round, partition firm and sure,
The waters underneath from those above
Dividing: for as Earth, so He the World
Built on circumfluous waters calm, in wide
Crystalline ocean.

Waters Below & Waters Above

What are the “waters below”? At this point the waters below mean all the water on the surface of the earth that was still mixed with earth. It would only be on the next day that God would create dry land and set the boundary of the seas.

The thorny issue is: What are the “waters above”? When God created the firmament, He sent up some of the water that had been on the planet’s surface. In the previous chapter we analyzed the theory that the waters above referred to water in orbit around the planet in a vapor canopy. Having ruled out this interpretation, two options present themselves: (1) the waters above refer to clouds and any water vapor in the atmosphere or (2) the waters above refer to cosmic water outside of the earth’s atmosphere. I favor the idea that the waters above refer to clouds and water vapor in the atmosphere. This fits with the fact that apparently there was rain before the Flood.

But some prominent creation scientists recently have advocated for the idea that the waters above refer to cosmic waters. For example, Bodie Hodge writes: “Regardless, this understanding of the text allows for the stars to be in the expanse, and this means that any waters above, which is beyond the stars, is not limited to

being in the atmosphere.” (Hodge, What is the State of the Water Vapor Canopy Model?, 2019) Andrew Snelling also mentions this interpretation. He writes:

However, it has recently been proposed that this “firmament” or “expanse” was instead interstellar space, which would then require that these “waters above the firmament” be cosmic in scale and represent an outer boundary for interstellar space. If this interpretation is correct, then this would place these “waters above” well beyond any further consideration with respect to their involvement in the earth’s atmosphere and climate system and in the Flood. (Snelling, 2014, p. 662)

Moses Not Mentioning that God saw that the Firmament was Good

Day 2 is the only day that ends without Moses writing that God reflected on what He had created as good. On the six other days of creation Moses writes that “God saw that it was good.” The text of the LXX (Septuagint)¹ does include the statement that “God saw that it was good” on Day 2. But this language is missing from the Hebrew text. No doubt the Greek translators of the Hebrew Bible added the words, “And God saw that it was good” to create consistency with the other creation days. No doubt Moses did not include these words in the *autographa*.² The question then rises: What is the significance of the fact that we have no record of God judging that the firmament He had created was good? Moses tells us that God saw on Day 1 that light was good, on Day 3 that the dry land and seas were good, on Day 4 that

¹ The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that was allegedly done by 70 scholars in Alexandria, Egypt.

² The original copy of Genesis as it came from the pen of Moses.

the sun, moon, and stars were good, on Day 5 that the birds and fish were good, and on Day 6 that the animals and man were very good.

I think the reason for this lack is that God does not consider his work on Day 2 as producing a finished product. The earth was still without form and void. Only after the creation of dry land and the beautiful plants on Day 3 would God express appreciation for what was a finished work. The creation of the firmament was not an end in itself, but the means of preparing the earth for His creative acts on the next days. God needed to create an atmosphere for plants and animals. He needed to create the sky as a space in which the birds could fly. Victor Hamilton speculates “that the author viewed the creation of the vault as only a preliminary stage to the emergence of the dry land in v. 10, and thus he reserved the phrase until its most appropriate time.” (Hamilton, 1990, p. 124) After God created dry land on the third day, the planet became inhabitable. God then pronounced his previous work “good”.