

On Day 5 the Lord God Created Fish and Birds

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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." 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. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

Genesis 1:20-23

A Beautiful Planet with No Animals

For the first time in human history the moon set in the east and the newly created sun rose in the sky. God Himself along with His angels look down on a world

filled with plant life. The sun shone on a green planet—filled with plants, trees, and flowers. But there was not a living, breathing creature alive.

On the fifth day in the history of our planet, God called into existence all the fish in the oceans and the birds of the air! God causes the oceans and freshwater lakes literally to swarm with fish. Great swimming animals dive in the two-day old oceans of this new planet. Great marine reptiles like the Mosasaurus swim along blue whales. Suddenly the skies team with flying animals, including birds and bats and pterodactyls.

The Creation of Marine Animals

On the fifth day, God created the swimming animals—all marine life. Moses records: “And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures” (vs. 20a). For the first time, God created animals that possessed life: God calls upon the waters to be filled with swarms of “living creatures.” These animals are described as “*nephesh hayah*”. The literal translation of these words is that the animals are breathing creatures that are alive. The word “nephesh” refers to breathing and inhalation through one’s throat. Animals are animate, living, breathing creatures.

Marine mammals are air-breathing creatures. Fish also breathe in their own way, although they breathe in their oxygen through the water. God now creates creatures that breathe and have a level of consciousness and that have the power to move from place to place. According to the Biblical viewpoint, plants do not have “*nephesh*”. Plants are not considered living, breathing creatures. Bacteria do not have “*nephesh*.” Marine and flying animals are living creatures. And man will become a living, breathing creature.

The first occurrence in Holy Scripture of the word translated “life” is found in verse 20: “And God said, Let the waters swarm with swarms of *living* creatures.” The word “living” refers to the fact that they are alive rather than dead.

Adam and Eve will not be allowed to eat animals that are living creatures. Instead, they will be given plant life to eat. It was only after Noah's Flood that God allowed humans to eat animals.

On the fifth day the continuing drama of creation reaches new heights—as it reaches forward to its completion on the sixth day—with the creation of man who has the breath of life as a living “*nephesh*.”

God made fish great and small: “So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds”(Genesis 1:21).

God Created *Tanninim*

God created great sea creatures: “And God created the great sea creatures” (Genesis 1:21).

For the first time since verse 1 we read the word “created” (*barah*): “And God *created* the great sea creatures,...”(Genesis 1:21). I think that Moses uses the verb “*barah*” here because the creation of the great marine animals reveals the incredible power of the deity. In carrying out His word, God created the “great,” the “*tanninim*”. The Hebrew word “*tanninim*” comes from an Hebrew root that means “to stretch”. Therefore, these creatures are long—they are stretched out.

Some have translated the word “*tanninim*” as “sea-monsters”.

Much discussion has focused on the identity of the enormous marine creatures. In Psalm 74 the Psalmist envisions the Red Sea crossing in terms of God triumphing over great sea creatures: “You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness” (Psalm 74:13-14). The Psalmist imagines God defeating sea creatures as the Israelites cross the Red Sea and

then feeding creatures in the wilderness with their flesh! This imaginative language is possible due to the great sea creatures that God created on the fifth day.

I like how the ESV translates “*tanninim*” as “the great sea creatures.” I prefer this to “sea monsters” which you can find in some translations. These are not mythical monsters—but the large sea creatures that God created and which filled the seas. They included great sea creatures like blue whales that still exist today. But they also include *plesiosaurs* whose only remains exist in fossils. It is true that we speak today of the “monsters of the deep”—but if we are intimidated by great sea creatures that are alive today—from killer whales to grey whales to giant squid—what must it have been like to see a *mausosaur* or a *leviathon*.

Grey whales and humpback whales and blue whales did not evolve from land animals—rather they existed a day before mammalian land animals were created on the 6th day.

In Genesis 1 the *tanninim* are simply large creatures of the water that are created by God. That why “great sea creatures” is a fitting translation. Moses is not writing about mythical sea creatures. In fact, in Psalm 148:7 the Psalmist calls upon these sea creatures and all deeps to praise the Lord: “Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths.”

Why does Moses make particular mention of great sea creatures? The largest marine reptiles and great whales have great bulk and amazing strength. They are remarkable evidence of the power and greatness of the Creator.

God also made small marine creatures. Genesis 1:21 speaks of “every living creature that moves” in the seas. He made diminutive aquatic creatures that either glide through the water or creep along the seabed.

All creatures, great and small, the Lord God made them all. On the fifth day God caused the oceans to swarm with fish.

Swarms of Marine Animals

What stands out on Day 5 is not just God's creation of a wide variety of swimming animals, but he creates tremendous numbers of each kind. He wishes the newly created seas to swarm with swarms of fish: "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures" (vs. 20a). One is struck by the generosity of God. He created massive numbers of fish and sea-life. The word "swarm" refers to great numbers of fish that congregate together and move about among one another. You have seen massive schools of fish.

God did not just create two of every fish or whale. Instead, He called into existence swarms of fish--vast populations of every kind! It is not stated that only a single pair was created of each kind. On the contrary the words "let the waters swarming swarm with living beings" seems to indicate that not only a rich variety of genera and species, but a large number of individuals was created. This immense variety of life—was good.

God is extravagant in His design of such a variety of swimming and flying animals.

Therefore, we should mourn the extinction of the passenger pigeon. When the settlers came to America, they saw vast flocks. Not a single passenger pigeon survives today. Due to excessive and reckless hunting they became extinct in the early 1900s. Think of how Americans almost causes the extinction of the American bison. Out of the vast herds that once roamed across the prairies—by the 1880s less than 100 remained in the wild! Americans hunted them solely for their tongues, skins, and bones. They left all the meat to rot on the ground.

God was extravagant in how many of each kind He makes. God was not just content to create two of each kind. Instead, we celebrate His extravagant generosity

in filling the oceans with swimming animals. How we rejoice to see videos of fish swarming in the oceans.

Flying Animals

God made the flying animals. He made the birds, bats, and pterodactyls to fill the skies. He created large birds like ostriches and rheas and condors. He made diminutive birds like hummingbirds and wrens and the tufted titmouse. God created birds that could not fly like penguins. He created flying mammals like bats. He created flying reptiles. On the fifth day of creation great flocks of flying animals filled the sky and pierced the air with their cries.

How did God create the fish and birds? Some have thought that verse 20 implies that God created the fish and birds out of water. The text in Genesis 1 does not tell us the element out of which the animals were created. It is possible that God created the fish out of the water, but the text does not say that. Genesis 1:24 implies that the land animals were formed out of the stuff of the ground: “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.” We find a similar thing said about the birds in Genesis 2:19: “So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.”

We observe two distinct acts of creation. First, God creates the matter of the earth *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). Second, God creates creatures like birds, animals, and man from the ground. God will use red clay as the raw material to form Adam.

Distinct *Baramin*

God created distinct kinds: “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.” In the creation account we read

repeatedly of God creating animals “after their kind” (Genesis 1:21). In verse 12 God creates plant-life after its kind. In verse 24 he creates animals after their kind. The Bible teaches that God created distinct species or genera. The Bible teaches that God made distinct species that would reproduce after their kind.

The Hebrew word for “*kind*” is “*min*”. Creation scientists use the word “*barahmin*” to refer to these kinds. The word “*barahmin*” is a combination of “*barah*” (to create) and “*min*” (kind). The original Hebrew root of the word carried the connotation of division. God created these specific types of animals. He created them according to their “*min*.” After the Fall they diversified in their “*min*”. For example, an eagle possibly had its own “kind.” Eagles can only reproduce with eagles. They can’t reproduce with robins (since robins belong to a different kind). There is no microevolution from one kind to another.

God created animals with the genetic ability to turn genes on and off to adapt to various environments. Certain types of fish when trapped in a cave, have the genetic ability to become blind and colorless. As an egg, the embryo can sense the dark, and accordingly becomes blind and colorless. In the cave, sight and color aren’t needed to hide from predators. So by switching the gene, they become more efficient, using less energy to maintain sight and color. If the cavefish then lays an egg in the light, the gene switch is reversed and the fish are born with normal pigments and with eyesight.

God created not just the animal—but also programmed in it the ability to adapt to a future environment. For example, polar bears came from an ancestral type of bear that adapted to blend into the snowy surroundings.

When did God Create the Fish and Birds?

When did God create the fish and the birds? The answer: The fifth day of the creation week. What is the relationship of the 5th day to the other days in the creation

week? Sometimes commentators make too much hay out of certain triads in the creation—3 days of preparing habitats for creatures—and then the last 3 days of creating creatures for the habitats. But things are more complex than that.

During each of the first four days God prepared the world for the birds and fish. The fifth day is related to the first day. Then God created the substance of the earth—from which the birds were later formed. He also created the water—from which the fish were perhaps formed. On the first day God created light—which laid the groundwork for a world in which light would play such an important role.

The fifth day is related to the second day. Then God had separated the waters above from the waters below. There is a sky where the birds can fly in freedom.

The fifth day is related to the third day. On the third day God created a *habitat* for the birds---for nesting and with food. God made dry ground so that the birds could have places to nest and land. Some birds do not fly like the ostrich or penguin. God created plants and fruit-trees and seaweed and plankton to provide food for the birds and whales.

The fifth day is also related to the third day because on the third day God made the oceans, seas, and lakes that would be the home for the fish created on the fifth day.

The fifth day is related to the fourth day—because the sun and moon and stars are now created and can provide the necessity of light for marine life and birds. God provided starlight for birds whether they are nocturnal or not. God also created the constellations that help direct birds during long migrations. Some birds fly at night and high over the clouds so that they can be directed by the stars to distant migrant grounds.

What is a “Day”?

The fish and birds are said to have been created on the fifth day. What is the nature of this “day”? It was an ordinary, historical, 24-hour day. Or to be more precise, it involved the complete revolution of the earth on her axis.

On the fifth day, since the sun has already been created, we can assert that this was a solar day.

The Bible generally employs the word “day” (*yom* in Hebrew) to signify either a twenty-four-hour solar day or the daylight portion of those hours. When modified by a number as “Day One” its universal Scriptural usage means a normal day—that involves *one revolution of the earth on its axis*. Sometimes “day” is used in Scripture to indicate a general period of time that is not precisely defined as in Job 7:6 or Psalm 90:9. But in these cases, “day” still means a finite succession of normal days; It cannot by any stretch of the exegetical imagination become vast ages.

“Day” can also occasionally be used of a portion of the year—like the days of the wheat harvest (Genesis 30:14). But here nothing other than a few weeks of normal solar days can be intended, not thousands of years.

The “day” of the Lord is a special day—which is a reference to the day when Jesus’ returns.

Scripture teaches that time does not apply to God. When speaking of a normal 24-hour day, the Apostle Peter says: “one day with the Lord is as a thousand years...” Peter’s point is that time does not apply to the eternal God.

God very clearly and explicitly in Genesis 1 defines what he means by “day” in Genesis 1 by the word for “day” that He uses and how He carefully defines these days.

As though in anticipation of future misunderstanding, God carefully defines His terms. First, God inspired Moses to use the ordinary word for a day, which is the

Hebrew word “*yom*.” Thousands and thousands of times this word is used in the Hebrew Bible with this original, basic sense.

Second, a day is defined in terms of a period of *darkness* and a period of *light*.

Third, God identifies the darkness as *night* and the period of light as *day*.

Fourth, God further distinguishes the days by defining them in term of “*evening*” and “*morning*”.

Fifth, further yet God distinguishes them as ordinary days by numbering them with sequential numbers: day *one*, the second day, and so on until the *fifth* day. Wherever we find *ordinal* numbers like this defining a day in the Bible it refers to an ordinary, historical day.

Sixth, God defines days in this sense for us on the fifth day also in a context where he *already created the sun*, moon, and stars on the fourth day. In fact, the fifth day was *the first full day that was warmed by the new sun*.

The writer of Genesis was *trying to guard in every way possible* against any of his readers deriving the notion of nonliteral days from his record. God made the heavens and the earth and all things in six ordinary, historical days—*six revolutions of our planet earth on her axis*.

God’s Purpose in Creating Fish and Birds

God created birds and fish for them to multiply and fill the oceans and earth. God blesses the fish and birds so that they might be fruitful: “And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth” (Genesis 1:22). God not only caused the oceans initially to swarm with vast numbers of swimming animals—but He also wanted their numbers to increase!

Therefore, we have the first reference to God blessing something. To *bless* is to wish well. God’s blessing is His *effectual speaking of a good thing that He wishes to occur*.

God wishes that the fish and birds would reproduce and fill the seas and skies. The word of blessing was the actual communication of the ability to propagate and increase in numbers. God gave animals the power to be prolific, fertile, and fruitful. With these words—and with the carrying out of them by His mighty power—God effectually grants to the swimming and flying animals the sexual fertility to reproduce in abundance. God gave the swimming and flying animals the astounding and complex ability to reproduce.

God caused the species to reproduce after their kind. God provided the reproductive capacities for the passing on of life. Morris explains:

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 program 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.

God even *commands* the birds and fish to multiply and be fruitful. But it is God's blessing that empowers the swimming and flying animals to reproduce in great numbers.

Given to Serve the Welfare of Mankind

God created fish and birds to serve mankind, the king of creation. Man was to have dominion over the earth populated with a marvelous variety of marine life. Birds would serve Noah when he was on the ark, allowing him to learn whether the flood waters had abated. God used a raven to provide food for Elijah at the brook Cherith. After the Flood, God explicitly tells Noah that the birds and fish are food for mankind:

The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps upon the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every

moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything (Genesis 9:2-3).

God fed the Israelites with quail in the wilderness. Jesus would multiply a few loaves of bread and a few fish to feed more than 5,000 hungry people.

God pronounces the marine animals and flying animals “GOOD”. God surveys His accomplishments: “and God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:21b). That is God’s moral pronouncement. It is good in the sense that it is useful. The birds and fish will function for the end they were created.

Exhibiting the Glorious Attributes and Existence of God

God wanted the birds and fish He created to exhibit the glory of His might and wisdom.

Fish and birds exhibit the *existence* of God. Paul writes: “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). You have no excuse for living life for yourself and your private personal pleasure and happiness. God made man. He has Creator rights over you. Yet man rebelled—and in his hatred for God wants to forget about Him. The fool says in his heart that there is no God. Matthew Henry says that the variety of the fish and birds—their different sizes, shapes, and abilities should serve “not only to silence and shame the objections of atheists” “but to raise high thoughts and high praises of God in pious and devout souls.”

It is possible for sinners to worship their Creator because of the atoning work of Jesus Christ on behalf of His own. The Apostle John writes: “All things were made by him (the Word); and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3). Do not treat Jesus Christ lightly! He is not just some ethical teacher—He is your Creator! And the only redeemer of fallen sons of Adam and Eve.

They exhibit the *power* of God: “Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing” (Isaiah 40:26). The universe with its billions of galaxies all exhibit the power of God.

The birds and fish exhibit the *creativity* of God. God showed his creativity in making the tail of the peacock. He created the platypus. He gave the male seahorse a pouch so that it could carry its’ young.

Fish and birds, great and small exhibit the *wisdom* of God. The Psalmist sings: “O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great” (Psalm 104:24-25).

The coot exhibits the wisdom of God. The coot is like a medium-sized duck. It is of a slate-gray color. It has yellow-green legs and a white bill and forehead. It can feed on land or in the water. It can scratch the ground like a chicken and fish like a duck. God made the feet of the coot unique. It has webs which fold around the toes when it walks on land. Upon entering the water, the folds open web-like.

Fish and birds exhibit the *glory* of God. The Psalmist sings: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1).

Responding to the birds and fish, we praise God their Creator. The pious Christian sings: “All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you!” (Psalm 145:10). We praise God as our Redeemer. We do this as new creatures to whom Christ has given life by His mighty Spirit.

John Calvin writes that God created mankind so that we would praise Him as Creator: “After the world had been created, man was placed in it as in a theatre, that he, beholding above him and beneath the wonderful works of God, might reverently adore their Author.”

Be thankful for the birds and fish that God has made. When you sit down to eat roast duck or some salmon with fettuccini, be thankful to the Lord!

Delight in the beauty and diversity of the fish and birds that the Lord God has made. Do not take flocks of birds for granted. Appreciate the swarms of fish that remain in the oceans of the world.

When you go fishing, stand in awe of the One who created all the fish and birds you see.

Contemplate His wisdom, power, and goodness, and worship Christ who is the one by whom everything was made and for whom they were created. Isn't it astounding that sharks and sea otters and hawks were created for the glory of Christ? The Apostle Paul writes about Christ:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—they were created through him and for him (Colossians 1:15-16).

I am astounded every time I read the words that all things were created “for” the Lord Jesus Christ. King salmon and perch and walleye were created for the glory of Christ. And especially mankind, the crown of creation, was created for the glory of Christ. Christ is glorified in His righteous judgment of the wicked. And He is glorified for the marvelous display of His love and grace towards His elect church.