

The Heights and Depths of Life

by Ray C. Stedman

On these Sunday mornings we are trying to search out the wonders God has hidden in this magnificent first chapter of Genesis. One of the Proverbs says, “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings is to search it out,” {cf, Prov 25:2}. God delights in hiding truth, not because he is trying to keep us from it, but because he wants to stimulate us to seek it out. In the first chapter of Genesis there is a great deal of truth hidden and it is exciting to find it.

I hope that, from Sunday to Sunday, you are trying to anticipate the hidden things of these passages. They are recreating for me something of the lure of my childhood games of hide-and-go-seek. Would we not lose half the glory of Christmas if the gifts that are put under the tree were not wrapped up and thus hidden from us? It adds to the lure and mystery of Christmas to have these gifts concealed behind wrappings. And what we are trying to do with Genesis 1 is to take off some of the wrappings and see what God has hidden here.

You will recall that we have found a hidden structure in this chapter; that the days do not follow one another in consecutive order, as we often take them to do, but we have found an overlapping, a recapitulation, a series of threes repeated twice. The first series is Days 1, 2, and 3, and then it begins again with Days 4, 5, and 6. These correspond in time and end with the seventh day on

which God rests from all his labors, a day without evening and morning. All this helps us to understand the correlation of this passage with what science has discovered in the world of nature around us. It adds to our excitement to see how God has recorded truth in this structured way.

If this structure be true, then Day 5, to which we come now, links very closely to Day 2. Days 1 and 4 also occur at the same time. As we saw last time, in Day 4 we have the account of the creation of the sun and the moon. It is striking that our week, which is based upon this creative week, begins with Sunday, the first day of the week. If we are right about this structure this would help explain why the name of the fourth day, which would properly be called Sunday, is given to the first day of the week, with Monday (or Moonday) following it. It is also helpful to note that the first of these series of three deals with realities, i.e., the existence of certain fundamental, basic realities of the physical world – light, the ocean and sky, and the land – while the second series of three deals with relationships, which are tied somehow to the first three:

- The sun and the moon explain how light came;
- The fish and the birds occupy the ocean and the sky; and
- The animals and man appear on the land.

But now we come to Verse 20 and the account of the fifth day of creation:

And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.” 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 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, a fifth day. {Gen 1:20-23 RSV}

There are here certain very interesting scientific points brought out in this brief passage. In Verse 20 it sounds as though we have the same kind of occurrence as that recorded in Verse 11, which reads, “And God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation,’” {Gen 1:11a RSV}. We saw that this suggested that perhaps there was a link between plant life and the lifeless matter which was there beforehand; that plant life in some sense came out of matter by a creative act of God. It looks as though this is also what we have in Verse 20, but that is the fault of our English translation. Actually, it is not the same structure in the Hebrew. Verse 20 does not say, “Let the waters bring forth...” as though there were a link between marine life and the waters. What is literally said in the Hebrew is, “Let the waters swarm with swarmers...” The verb and the noun are very similar to one another and come from the same root. “Let the waters swarm with swarmers, and let flyers fly,” is what God said.

This divine word produced marine life and the birds, and the form of it suggests no connection with any preceding material. This is strengthened by the very next verse where, for the second time in this entire passage, we have the word *created* appearing. “God created the great sea monsters and every living creature” ... and the birds. The first use of *create* was in the very first verse of the chapter. It is significant that again we have this particular word brought in. God now does a new thing. There had been no animal life of any kind before, but now it is created in the same way he

brought the earth, in the beginning, out of nothing. It strongly suggests that animal life did not evolve from lifeless matter.

The interesting thing is that this is also what the fossil records suggest. One of the many puzzles to scientists has been the total absence of missing links, intermediary bodies, between inorganic matter and the first appearance of life, as well as between the earliest forms of life and some of the more complex structures we know today. Where are these missing links? There are not only one or two missing, but millions and millions. The fascinating thing is that, according to the fossil record, life in the seas appears suddenly and fully developed. Science has puzzled much over this. The major divisions of animal life as we know them, except vertebrates, appear nearly simultaneously very early in the fossil records. And in those fossil remains the crustaceans, for example, are found to be fully developed crustaceans much as they are today; the mollusks (shell fish, etc.) are fully developed shellfish, varying only slightly from those we know today. This is thus in accord with this Genesis record which says that God produced marine life suddenly. He created this kind of life.

Also in Verse 20 we have the first appearance in Scripture of a very remarkable and important word. We are told that God brought forth in the waters “swarms of living creatures.” “Living creatures” is a translation of a single Hebrew word *nephesh*, which means “soul.” Here we have the first appearance of creatures with souls. Perhaps you never realized before that animals as well as men have souls, but they do. The soul marks the major difference between animal and plant life. You can observe that for yourself. Trees and cabbages can grow and reproduce, which shows they are alive, but they do not fall in love with each other! You might see two cabbages putting their heads together but that is no sign a romance is developing. Nor are they able to remember the past, nor do they suffer from a bad conscience. These are all the faculties of soul. The mark of animal life, even marine life and bird life, is that animals can think and feel and decide. Those are the three major functions of the soul – the rational, the emotional, and the volitional functions.

These are rather highly developed in some animals. Any of you who have paid a visit to Marineland and seen the educated dolphins there know how intelligent creatures can be. They even

put some of us human beings to shame. If you have ever had, as I have had, an interesting conversation with a Mynah bird, you will realize how intelligent even birds can be. (I will admit that he changed the subject very frequently, but we had an interesting time talking together.) But the use of *nephesh* indicates that God has done something new in bringing forth animal creation into the world.

Notice also in Verse 21 that among the marine life were what is called here “great sea monsters.” That is surely a more accurate rendering than that found in the King James Version, where these are called “whales.” They are not necessarily whales. The Hebrew word here is most interesting; it means, literally, “long-extended things,” whatever they might be. It is tempting, I admit, to link these with the age of reptiles when long-extended things crept around on the earth and swam in the seas, but it is only speculation to do so and I will not indulge it. However, it would be a rather ironic divine joke if the steadily increasing evidence would confirm the existence of such a long-extended monster in Loch Ness, over in Scotland. God has a wonderful sense of humor and it is just like him to pull a trick like that.

In Verse 22 another interesting point is made. We read that God not only pronounced all this good, as he had done before, but he does a new thing as well. When God pronounces something good, we have come to understand that this means it is in line with his divine purposes, and in accordance with his divine character. Everything good comes from God and only that which is good comes from God. But now for the first time we read, “And God blessed them, saying ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’” This blessing of God seems to be linked somehow with the function of sex. “Be fruitful” he says, “and multiply and fill the earth.”

It is interesting to note that plants and trees also reproduce. There is a type of sexual function within the plant world, but it is without the qualities of volition and emotion. There is no sense of choice – plants reproduce haphazardly, at random, as it were; and there is no emotion involved as far as we can detect. Plants lack entirely the emotional faculty. But both qualities are involved in animal reproduction. There is in the animal kingdom the addition of desire and choice to the function of sex,

and this seems to be the meaning of the blessing of God. We find this in its highest zenith in man, and God blessed the man and the woman in similar language. We shall look at that more closely when we come to the sixth day of creation, when man appears. But it is interesting here to note that even in the animal creation the blessing of God ties in somehow with this remarkable divine function of sex, and includes the qualities of pleasure and of choice.

So much for the physical level of understanding of this passage. It is very fascinating and we could follow some of these leads even further. But, as we have seen all along, it is a mistake to get tied down to the physical only. That level is not the reason why this chapter was written. It is not designed primarily to inform us scientifically. We have seen all along that the physical is a projection into the visible realm of that which is true, in a deeper and more crucial sense, in the spiritual kingdom which surrounds us on every side. That is where the truest reality lies. The physical world around us is but a faint reflection of the unseen, invisible reality of the spiritual. We tend to think of it the other way around. We think that what is seen is clear, real, and important. But the longer we live and understand the revelation of God, the more we see it is the other way about. The physical is but the faintest reflection of the real. This truth forms the basis for an understanding of the physical world and the great lessons it teaches us concerning the unseen kingdom. Since it is invisible, we need the visible in order to remind us of it.

Milton, in one of his poems, asks this question:

What if earth be but the shadow of heaven
And things therein each to the other like.
More than on earth is thought?

What if, indeed? That is exactly what we are discovering here. Since this is so, then, as we have already seen, the physical is a constant reminder to us of the spiritual – once the key is found! You cannot start with nature and find your way to God. Men have found this true throughout many centuries of endeavor. Nature is not the key to the world of revelation, the unseen realities of God. It is the other way around. Once we have the revelation of God we can understand the reason behind nature; we can probe the mystery of nature. And nature without revelation is a mystery. No one can un-

derstand why it operates the way it does. Scientists can puzzle out, to a limited degree, how it operates but they cannot discover why nature does things in a particular way. It takes the revelation of God to do that. That is why these two sources of knowledge about life are so important to read together; one unfolds the other.

If that be the case, then Genesis 1 is kind of a table of contents, if you like, to the rest of Scripture. This is what we have been finding. It introduces the great themes which are amplified throughout the rest of this amazing book. Let me review briefly what we have found and you will see how this is true. Take the four days we have looked thus far:

1. Light and darkness was a picture for us of the existence in the universe of good and evil, and the necessity for continual choices to be made between these two. This is a basic, fundamental theme of life which runs all the way through Scripture, and all the way through human life.
2. Then we saw how the ocean and sky, divided asunder, are a picture for us of the reality of both physical life and spiritual life:
 - a seen, visible, life; and
 - an unseen, invisible, life.
3. Then the separation of the land from the seas became a picture of the two divisions of physical humanity; that which is barren, pictured by the ocean; and that which is capable of producing the fruit God desires – a regenerate humanity, the new humanity, in Jesus Christ.
4. We saw also that the sun and the moon figured for us the Lord and his people:
 - the sun shining in brightness as the light of the world, as Jesus said of himself, “I am the light of the world” {John 8:12b}, and
 - the moon, reflecting the brightness of the sun, shining in the darkness of the night as a picture of the church shining in the moral darkness of this world, the only light the world in its darkness has.

But now we come to this fifth day. What does it mean that God created the fishes and the birds and told them to be fruitful and multiply, and fill

the ocean with fish and the sky with birds? Let me ask you: Would it not be unthinkable that such a remarkable table of contents as this would omit the truth which occupies more space than any other in the Bible, and which is one of the chief goals toward which God’s redemptive love moves? It is impossible to think so. I am speaking, of course, of the great truth of the possibility of living in continual victory over an alien or hostile environment. This is what the Bible continually aims at. It is trying to teach us how to live in the midst of pressures, problems, dangers, and perils, and to live, not at a mere subsistence level, but triumphantly, victoriously, “more than conquerors,” as Paul puts it in Romans 8 {Rom 8:37}. Is that not the great truth toward which all of revelation moves? That we might be triumphant; that we might echo with the Apostle Paul, “Thanks be unto God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph and spreads abroad the fragrance of his presence everywhere we go,” {cf, 2 Cor 2:14}. That is the truth that is figured for us on this fifth day.

Genesis 1, we must remember, was written from humanity’s point of view, since only man could ever get the point of all this. If it has spiritual significance it is intended for us. We are the only creatures on this earth that could possibly grasp this kind of information. And, more specifically, it is written for the Spirit-taught man, the one whose mind and heart is open to the teaching of the Spirit of God and to whom the Spirit of God can open the “deep things of God” that Paul speaks of in First Corinthians 2. If that be the case, then we must look upon this whole record from the standpoint of what it means to us. As man looks at the ocean around and the sky above him, he sees that which is essentially an alien atmosphere, an alien environment:

- The ocean, in and of itself, is hostile to human life. We can swim in the ocean, yes, but not for very long. If we should suddenly be cast into the midst of the ocean without any means of support we would not last very long. It is absolutely alien to us.
- The air above, though it is that which we breathe to sustain life, we have found to be an alien realm as far as transportation is concerned. It is interesting to read through ancient

records and see how long man has dreamed of flying.

In Greek mythology there is the story of Icarus, the young man who dreamed of flying like the gods. In order to escape their prison, his father made wings of feathers and wax. Although cautioned not to fly too near the sun Icarus did not listen, and as he soared up into the sky the wings melted and he fell into the sea and perished.

Man has been dreaming of flying for centuries, but he has never been able to do it, of himself. So there are two realms in the natural world in which man as man is unable to operate effectively.

We must now come to an attempt to understand this on the spiritual level:

- We have already seen that the oceans are a picture of unredeemed and barren humanity, the world without Christ, the world of organized society with its systems of values, its power structures, and its methods of operating. You and I, as Christians, know well that if an individual believer attempts to live in that kind of a world on his own resources he is doomed. It is not very long before his spiritual life is suffocated and he finds himself unable to live spiritually. If he tries it on his own, he is doomed and he will drown.
- On the other hand, the atmosphere is a picture of the spiritual life, “the heavenlies” Paul calls them in Ephesians {cf, Eph 1:3, 1:20, 2:6, 3:10, 6:12}, the place where we live, in the realm of divine reality, a life that is pleasing to God. Here again, if an individual believer attempts to operate in this realm on his own resources he will not die, but he will find he gets nowhere. Trying to live the Christian life in the energy of the flesh, in a dedicated, sincere effort to do that which is pleasing to God apart from a dependence upon the life of the Spirit of God within, always ends up in frustration and bafflement. This is what Christians discover as they go along, that they are not made for this realm; they cannot operate in and of themselves. They find themselves like a man trying to fly through the sky with his own arms, frustrated, baffled, impotent, unable to function.

But here is the picture of this fifth day: By a direct impartation of divine life, on which man learns to depend, a believer can live in the hostile environment of the world around as a fish lives in the sea – gracefully, powerfully, abundantly. He can learn to operate in this realm and live in this hostile atmosphere effectively; that is the picture here. Also, in that rarefied atmosphere of the spiritual life where a fall would be fatal, a believer, depending upon the life of God within, can fly like a bird, free to roam at will. In fact, Isaiah puts it that very way:

... they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run, and not be weary, they shall walk, and not faint.

{Isa 40:31 KJV}

Is this not also the reason for the blessing of God that comes at this point?

Here is the exercise of a divine gift. But, like the gift of sex that was given to the physical realm of animal creation, it is not automatically exercised. It requires volition and choice. Translating that into the spiritual realm, you do not live in the world as a Christian and automatically experience the divine help that makes it possible to survive and to enjoy your circumstances. You must choose this. It is a moment by moment choice. And it results in emotion. It is glorious, exciting, enjoyable. It is challenging, demanding, vitalizing. That is why you have at this point the blessing of God mentioned, because it describes a new and exciting function imparted by the divine life.

“But,” someone is saying, “Look, man has found a way by which he can travel in the sea and in the air. We have ships and even submarines which can go into the very depths of the sea, we have airplanes that can fly through the sky, and we do it all the time. Man has learned how to survive in these environments.” Ah, but look more closely at that. Man has learned to imitate the fish, and imitate the bird, but he is as unable to do it in and of himself as he always was.

The significant thing is that every now and then these imitations crack up. When they do, they prove themselves to be what they are – a mere imitation of the real thing:

- A submarine, when something goes wrong, is immediately in terrible danger, and the inhabitants of it become frantically aware that they were not made for the sea. When the forces on which they were relying cease their function for any reason whatsoever they are as exposed to danger and death as if they were naked.
- When something goes wrong with an airplane it comes crashing to earth to reveal itself to be only what it is: a clever but unreliable imitation of the real thing.

See how this is all designed to picture for us these great and marvelous truths? You would never understand them by reading the first chapter of Genesis alone; it takes the whole Bible to make this clear. But the wonder of it is, once we understand the message of the Scriptures, we can come back and see that it is all here right from the beginning, thus marking this amazing book as coming from a divine mind – revealed to man and coming through man but envisioning all the divine wisdom and understanding given to us by the Spirit of God.

What a lesson there is in this fifth day for us. The next time we watch a bird fly, or a fish swim, I trust the lesson will come home to our hearts. You and I cannot live in the world, this satanically governed society, apart from a moment by moment dependence upon the imparted divine life which alone makes survival, victory, and triumph possible.

Nor can we exist of ourselves in the realm of the spiritual. The flesh, with its sleazy imitation of the real thing, may make us look as if we are able to fly in the spiritual realm – for a while. But sooner or later we will come crashing down, to expose ourselves as the phonies we really are. Nothing but the real thing, nothing but a genuine dependence upon an imparted life, can make it possible to fulfill what Isaiah envisioned, to mount up with wings like eagles, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint. What a glorious experience this is!

I do not know how to put this in terms that will really capture your imagination. I do not know how to say this in such a way that young people, particularly, will see that this is what God intended you to experience. It is not the dull, dead, defeated life that is so often characteristics of Christians, making them look as though they were soaked in

embalming fluid for half an hour a day – but it is the adventure of a life that meets every problem by reliance upon the God who dwells within, who is adequate for every situation, and who makes it possible to survive miraculously despite a hostile environment.

Is this not what you see in the New Testament figure in the incident of Peter's walking on the water? There is a man doing an unnatural thing. How was it that Peter was able to walk on the water when Jesus bade him to come? Peter never understood the process, he never solved the problem by himself. He did not conduct a series of scientific researches until he finally understood how to make water bear human weight, and then step out upon it. No, he simply obeyed his Lord and in dependence upon him, walked on the water. Of course, when he got his eye off his Lord he began to sink and he had to cry out to the Lord to save him. Then the Lord lifted him up and the two walked back together. That is a picture of the spiritual life, the life God intends to be lived:

- It is to be *in* this world, but not *of* it; and
- In the realm of the heavenlies, in which the natural man is not made to survive and the flesh has no power to function, and yet
- To be able, in both cases, to manifest the triumph of divine wisdom and live in victory over every surrounding circumstance.

Now translate that into your life at home. There is where you run into the rough friction of life. That is where you get right down to the blood, sweat, and tears – the nitty-gritty of life. There is where you experience the hostility of the world, and the frustration of not being able, in your own strength, to meet the problems that come to you. But that is exactly where divine life is intended to operate. As you learn to lay hold of this continual impartation of the life of Jesus Christ in you, given by a divine creative act, you will discover that you can, moment by moment, hour by hour, meet every problem in the fullness of his resources and live in victory over the hostile environment of your life.

Is that not what Scripture promises?

These glowing wonderful promises of God are intended to be translated into daily experience.

Prayer:

Thank you, our Father, for the lesson of the fish and the fowls. We pray that this lesson may not be lost upon us the next time we see birds flying in the air, or fish streaming through the waters. Grant to us,

Lord, that we may be reminded thereby that you have made adequate provision for us to live in the hostile environment in which we find ourselves, alien to us as men and yet open to us as believers in the Spirit of God. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.