

Let There Be Light

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I could start this by summarizing what's going on out there right now: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God!'" (Psalm 14:1; 53:1)

The book of Genesis opens with a majestic description of how God first created the heavens and earth and then how He organized the earth. It conveys the picture of the all-powerful, transcendent God who sets everything in place with supreme skill in conformity to His grand design. The emphasis of chapter one is mainly on how God orders or structures everything.

Genesis 1:1-2 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

The effect of the opening words of the Bible is to establish that God, in His perfect wisdom, sovereign power, and majesty, is the Creator of all things that exist. Genesis 1 says that God created everything, but it is also an account of how God has structured creation in its organized complexity. We are introduced in the first three days to day, night, the heavens, earth, seas—all these items, and only these, being specifically named by God.

After declaring that God is the Creator of all things, the focus of the rest of Genesis 1 (beginning in verse 3) is mainly on God bringing things into existence by His Word and organizing the created things (such as, "let the waters . . . be gathered together"), rather than on how the earth was initially created. Different features indicate this. For example, vegetation is mentioned on day 3, prior to the apparent creation of the sun on day 4.

So, this begs the question: How is it that the Bible represents light as existing before the sun and moon were created?

The absolute power of God is conveyed by the fact that He merely speaks and things are created. Each new section of chapter 1 is introduced by God speaking. Verse 3 is the first of the 10 words of creation in chapter 1.

Genesis 1:3-4 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.

Light is the first of God's creative works that God speaks into existence. Everything that God brings into being is good. The word "be" simply expresses the existence of the light by whatever means or from whatever area it comes into the existing locality. It might have been by an absolute act of pure creation; that is, making it out of nothing. It also may be caused by a supernatural event that removes an otherwise insurmountable hindrance and opens the way for the already existing light to penetrate into the previously darkened region. This describes conditions to permit light to penetrate the earth's atmosphere.

This phrase, "Let there be light" is therefore in perfect harmony with pre-existence of light among the other elementary parts of the universe from the very beginning of things.

Genesis 1:5 God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So, the evening and the morning were the first day.

The focus in verse 5 is on how God has ordered time on a weekly cycle; thus, "let there be light" indicates the dawning of a new day.

This sense of time being structured is further emphasized throughout the chapter as each stage of God's ordering and filling is separated by evening and morning into specific days.

What happened up until the fourth day of creation? The darkness has been removed from the face of the deep, its waters have been distributed in due proportions above and below the expanse; the lower waters have retired and given place to the emerging land, and the desolation of the land that has been exposed to view has begun to be made alive with the living forms of a new vegetation.

Next, the Great Designer begins a new cycle of supernatural operations. Day four develops this idea further: The lights are placed in the heavens for signs and seasons, for the purpose of marking days and years and the seasons of God's feasts, such as Passover.

Genesis 1:14-16 Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also.

The greater light is obviously the sun, our major source of natural light. This fiery ball of super-heated hydrogen and helium gases contains 99.9% of all matter in the solar system. In terms of size, the sun has a diameter of roughly 1.4 million kilometers (870,000 miles). To put this in perspective, this is almost 110 times the diameter of the Earth. This means that about one million Earths could fit inside the sun, with room to spare. It is 398,000 times larger than the lesser light, the moon. (My mind is already blown at this point, trying to imagine the sizes.) Our solar system has 181 moons, 552,894 asteroids, and 3083 comets.

The immense universe, represented by the stars that God created, is mentioned here only in a brief phrase in verse 16, almost as if it were an afterthought. But obviously, the stars, which help form galaxies, are not insignificant.

Some estimates for the number of yellow dwarf stars—similar to the Sun in the Milky Way galaxy—are as high as 7 billion. If this number is correct, there could be over one trillion stars that are roughly the same as our sun in the Universe.

Most galaxies in the universe are actually dwarf galaxies. These are relatively small when compared to other galaxies. Dwarf galaxies are roughly one hundredth the size of the Milky Way with only a few billion stars. Inside the Milky Way, there are at least 100 billion planets and anywhere from 200-400 billion stars.

The fourth day corresponds closely with the ordering of day and night on the first day, involving the separation of light and darkness. The emphasis of the fourth day is on the creation of lights that will govern time, as well as providing light upon the earth. By referring to them as the "greater light" and "lesser light."

The term "made" (as in "God made two great lights") need only mean that God "fashioned" or "worked on" them, but it does not of itself imply that they did not exist in any form before this. Rather, the focus here is on the way in which God has ordained the sun and moon to work and define the passing of time according to His purposes.

Thus, the references to seasons or "appointed times" and to days and years are probably a reference to the appointed times and patterns in God's sacred calendar for feast and holy observances.

The work of the fourth day has much in common with that of the first day, which it continues and completes. Both deal with light and with dividing between light and darkness, or day and night.

Genesis 1:17-19 God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

While the first day refers only to the day and its twofold division, the fourth day refers to signs, seasons, days, and years. These lights are for "signs." They are to serve as the great natural timepiece of mankind, having its three units—the day, the month, and the year—and marking the divisions of time, not only for agricultural and social purposes, but also for meting out the eras of human history and the cycles of natural science. They are signs of place as well as of time.

The "seasons" are the natural seasons of the year, and the set times for civil and sacred purposes which are attached to special days and years.

Since the word "day" is a key to the explanation of the first day's work; so, is the word "year" to the interpretation of that of the fourth day.

The focus of Genesis 1 is on God's sovereignty over the earth. The focus of the rest of the Bible is on God's sovereignty over, and relationship with, mankind as the pinnacle of His creation and the object of His great salvation.

Genesis 1 establishes a hierarchy of authority from the beginning. Then, beginning in the second chapter of Genesis, humanity is divinely commissioned to govern other creatures on God's behalf, the ultimate purpose being that the whole earth should display His glory.