

Series: Shalom

July 10, 2016

Title: Taming Sea and Sky

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Text: Genesis 1:6-8, 20-23

Water

The One Essential:

Last September NASA scientists announced that they had found evidence of liquid water on Mars. There had been plenty of hints, to be sure, but no firm proof. Then, on September 28, 2015:

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*"...NASA scientists announced they'd found [water] on Mars: Dark streaks that scientists have spotted seasonally for more than a decade in images of the Red Planet are evidence of flowing water, new research suggests."
(livescience.com)*

And with that discovery came the very real possibility that there not only were, but are living organisms on Mars.

Unlike Mars, our planet sits in the "sweet spot" for water. The temperatures on Earth allow water to exist as a solid, a liquid and a gas. And wherever water is found, life is there, too. Life grows in volcanic hot springs and in ice-covered lakes. It grows all over Earth's surface and in the ocean's deepest canyons. It grows underground and in the atmosphere. All it takes is *water*.

The Face of the Deep:

The Creation Story in Genesis begins by telling us that the world was covered with water. For ancient peoples water was a mixed blessing. It was vital for life and agriculture. Each year they prayed ardently for rain to fall and bring life to their crops. They dug wells and cisterns to provide water in a semi-arid part of the world.

But it could also be a powerful and untamed element – destroying everything in its path. The sea was seen as a realm of untamed chaos. Think of recent news stories from West Virginia or Texas: rains of biblical

proportions hammered communities, flooding cities and rushing through villages in mountain valleys. We've all seen the footage of helicopter rescues, cars tumbling down riverbeds, homes filled with mud and debris.

That's the way it is with water: too much or too little and you are in major trouble. Just the right amount? And you have *shalom*.

Shalom:

The Creation Story is the story of God making the world a place where we could live and thrive. We saw earlier that God's first gift to the world was His creation of Time. He created ways to chop Time into measurable bits; He created ways for us to use the sun, moon and stars to keep track of those bits of Time. The story of humankind has been one of clocks and calendars ever since.

God's second great gift to His world was the gift of Water. But to give that gift He would need to make water functional and useful. And that would mean the taming of sky and sea.

Sea and Sky

Creation: Day Two

Day Two of the Creation Story gives us the first way in which God went about taming sky and sea:

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Genesis 1:6-8 NIV

And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water."

So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so.

God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning – the second day.

Separating the waters:

In order to make sense of this story, we need to see the world the way the ancient people of biblical times envisioned it. For them, the world was at first

a watery, chaotic mass. We see this stated in Genesis 1:2, where the world is described as “formless and empty,” with “darkness...over the surface of the deep.” God is present through His Spirit, or Wind, “hovering over the waters.”

Day Two tells how God took this watery world and made it a safe and relatively predictable place where humans could live and thrive. To do so, God *separates* water into two distinct places by erecting a barrier – what the NIV calls a “vault.”

With this vault in place, God could then store up water above the earth, to be released through openings in the vault – think “windows of heaven” – to water the earth. The rest of earth’s water was down below, in lakes, rivers and oceans, and underground.

Water and Sky:

In writing about Day Two, John Walton explains that what God created was in essence “Weather.” The world would not be a watery chaos, but was to be a place where water had its place – both above and below. Think Sky and Sea.

For ancient peoples, rain came when God or the gods opened the windows in the sky vault, thus letting rain from the “waters above” pour down onto the earth. This happened on a relatively predictable basis, allowing them to plant crops at the right season so that the winter rains would nourish the plants until harvest.

And even though our understanding of the way weather happens is much different, we are just as much indebted to God for His gift of Weather! The weather is a chief topic of conversation every day. It is often the main thing that keeps us watching the local news. The weather, and the long-term climate it produces, determines where we live, what we eat, and how our many human societies get along with each other.

God first great gift was the Gift of Time. His second great gift was the Gift of Weather.

Taming Sea and Sky

Day Five:

Just as Day One and Day Four go together in the Creation Story, the same is true of Day Two and Day Five. On Day Two God separates the watery chaos into two distinct entities by means of the sky-vault. On Day Five He makes them each a place of life and blessing:

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Genesis 1:20 NIV

And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky."

Not only has God brought order to the watery chaos, but He makes it a home for living creatures. Both the sky and the sea swarm with life. No longer is water a chaotic, untamed force to be feared. It has become a habitat for untold millions of living things. And the same is true of the space under the sky-vault. Just as the aquatic creatures "tame" the waters, the birds "tame" the air.

Creatures great and small:

The story goes on to emphasize the fact that it is God alone who does the creating.

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Genesis 1:21 NIV

So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Here, for the first time since verse one in the story, we find the word "create." It's there for a reason. In the ancient world, the sea was thought of as a vast, untamed and chaotic realm. It had not been ordered during the creation of the world. And in it were sea monsters that many thought of as evil gods, intent on destruction. Think, for example of the beast that comes from the sea in Revelation.

But in the Genesis story, the sea monsters are simply God's creation, like everything else. They are subject to Him. They are part of His taming of the seas.

Blessing:

The other important thing to note about Day Five is that it contains a blessing:

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Genesis 1:22-23 NIV

God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth."

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

This is the first creation blessing. With it comes the power to "be fruitful," "to increase in number," and to fill the earth. God tamed the sky and sea, separating the waters and providing a way to water the earth. But more than that, He took what was dangerous and unpredictable and turned it into a home for creatures great and small. And most of all, He made it a place of blessing and abundance, a place to be filled with life overflowing.

We live in a blessed world!

Taming Sea and Sky:

A tamed sea and a tamed sky means *shalom*.

Like ancient peoples, we too live in a world that can seem to be filled with untamed forces. The monsters of the deep may present themselves as a frightening disease that defies our brightest minds and best technologies. They may present themselves as uprisings in the political and international realm. They may threaten our economic security. They may seem to threaten our very climate.

But the Creation Story reminds us that God tamed the forces of chaos to create a place of *shalom*. He didn't *remove* these elements entirely. He didn't abolish darkness; instead, He created Light. Light and Dark together He used to make Time.

Likewise, He didn't abolish water. Instead, He tamed it to do His will. And He made it a home for living things great and small.

And He will do the same with the seemingly untamed things in our lives. He puts them in their place. Even that last awful monster – Death – is no match for Him!

As Isaiah writes:

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Isaiah 25:7-8 NIV

On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever.

The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from the earth. The LORD has spoken.