

The Hovering Spirit

And Baptismal Waters

² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (ESV)

Genesis 1:2

On Baptism

IN HIS BOOK *ON BAPTISM*, the great African church Father **Tertullian** (c. 160 – 225) begins, “Happy is our sacrament of water . . . In what respect, pray, has this material substance [water] merited an office of so high dignity? . . . from the very beginning . . . water is one of those things which, before all the furnishing of the world, were quiescent with God in a yet unshapen state. ‘In the first beginning,’ saith Scripture, ‘God made the heaven and the earth. But the earth was invisible, and unorganized, and darkness was over the abyss; and the Spirit of the Lord was hovering over the

waters” (On Baptism 1.1; 3.1).¹ We see here that Tertullian links Genesis 1:1-2 with baptism. I also want to point out his language of “furnishing the world.” Keep that in mind.

When I first made this strange connection in my own mind between baptism and Genesis, I told a friend who was going to Westminster Theological Seminary about it. He was intrigued. He went and told a professor who immediately pooh-poohed the idea saying something like, “You can’t have baptism without people. That’s ridiculous.” I have subsequently found that Tertullian was far from alone.

Theodotus (second century) writes, “Now, regeneration is by water and spirit, as was all creation: “For the Spirit of God moved on the abyss.”¹ And for this reason the Saviour was baptized (Excerpts from Theodotus VII).² **Aphrahat** (c. 270–350), “The Persian Sage” says, “For from baptism do we receive the Spirit of Christ. For in that hour in which the

¹ Cited in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume III: Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, trans. S. Thelwall, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 670.

¹ Gen. 1:2.

² Theodotus, *Excerpts of Theodotus, or, Selections from the Prophetic Scriptures*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. William Wilson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume VIII: Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, the Clementina, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 44.

priests invoke the Spirit, the heavens open and it descends and *moves upon the waters*” (Demonstration VI: Of Monks §14).³

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–386), “But if any one wishes to know why the grace is given by water and not by a different element, let him take up the Divine Scriptures and he shall learn. For water is a grand thing, and the noblest of the four visible elements of the world. Heaven is the dwelling-place of Angels, but the heavens are from the waters⁷: the earth is the place of men, but the earth is from the waters: and before the whole six days’ formation of the things that were made, *the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water*” (Catechetical Lectures III.5). He then compares the Jordan as the beginning of the Gospel, citing also Israel’s deliverance from Pharaoh through the sea, the flood and Noah, the river of Mount Sinai, Elijah’s crossing the Jordan, the high priest being washed, and Aaron being washed, and the symbol of the laver in the tabernacle.⁴

³ Aphrahat, *Select Demonstrations*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. A. Edward Johnston, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Volume XIII: Gregory the Great (Part II), Ephraim Syrus, Aphrahat* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1898), 371.

⁷ Compare ix. 5.

⁴ “The water was the beginning of the world, and Jordan the beginning of the Gospel tidings: for Israel deliverance from Pharaoh was through the sea, and for the world deliverance from sins *by the washing of water with the word* of God. Where a covenant is made with any, there is water also. After the flood, a covenant was made with Noah: a covenant for Israel from Mount

Ambrose of Milan (c. 333–397), “Consider, however, how ancient is the mystery [of baptism] prefigured even in the origin of the world itself. In the very beginning, when God made the heaven and the earth, ‘the Spirit,’ it is said, ‘moved upon the waters.’” (*On the Mysteries* III.9.).⁵ And **Augustine** (354–430) writes in a work on baptism, “This is the Spirit which from the beginning ‘moved upon the face of the waters.’ For neither can the Spirit act without the water, nor the water without the Spirit” (*On Baptism* 6.12.18).⁶ Finally, **John of Damascus** (c. 650–750), writing nearly 500 years after Tertullian still remembers that which is now by and large forgotten, “For from the beginning *the Spirit of God*

Sinai, but *with water, and scarlet wool, and byssop*. Elias is taken up, but not apart from water: for first he crosses the Jordan, then in a chariot mounts the heaven. The high-priest is first washed, then offers incense; for Aaron first washed, then was made high-priest: for how could one who had not yet been purified by water pray for the rest? Also as a symbol of Baptism there was a laver set apart within the Tabernacle.” **Cyril of Jerusalem**, *The Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. R. W. Church and Edwin Hamilton Gifford, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Volume VII: S. Cyril of Jerusalem, S. Gregory Nazianzen* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1894), 15.

⁵ Ambrose of Milan, *On the Mysteries*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin, and H. T. F. Duckworth, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Volume X: St. Ambrose: Select Works and Letters* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1896), 318.

⁶ Augustine of Hippo, *On Baptism, Against the Donatists*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. R. King, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, Volume IV: St. Augustin: The Writings Against the Manichaeans and Against the Donatists* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 484.

moved upon the face of the waters, and anew the Scripture witnessed that water has the power of purification [Lev 15:10]. In the time of Noah God washed away the sin of the world by water [Gen 6:17]” (*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 4.9--Concerning Faith and Baptism).⁷

Through this ancient idea, what I want to do today is introduce you to what God is doing in Genesis 1. My goal is not only to help you learn to read this story in its own context on its own terms, but to help you learn to think theologically about it. I also want to help you learn to think practically about this very important topic, this “mystery” that Christ commands all Christians to undergo.

A Question of Translation

We will begin by looking at our verse, just quoted several times by the Fathers: **Genesis 1:2**. The ESV reads, “*The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*” There is a **grammatical question** here, just as there was in verse 1. How should we

⁷ John Damascene, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Volume IX: St. Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus*, vol. 9b (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1899), 78.

translate this verse? The ESV chooses to make it a complete thought. However, this seems to me to be incorrect.

The verse begins with a *vuv* (ו). It is usually translated. When it is translated, it is usually given the word “and” or “now.” You will notice the ESV leaves “and” out. Perhaps it has the “now” idea in mind. “**Now the earth was without form and void...**” This seems to be a complete thought, just like the ESV. If you go with “and,” it would read something like “**and the earth was without form and void...**” This would connect it to the previous verse. Depending on how you translate vs. 1, you could have it part of another incomplete thought like this, “**When God began to create heaven and earth -- the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water -- (Gen 1:2 TNK).**”

There are a lot of “ands” in Genesis 1. In fact, they are special “ands.” They have a technical term called the *waw* (pronounced “v”) *consecutive*. Unlike your sixth grade English teacher who told you never to start a sentence with “and,” Hebrew loves to do it, especially when telling stories. Some like to press the point that *waw* consecutives give temporal sequence, because they are so common in historical narratives. However, they are just as common in poetry. In fact, you find them throughout one of Job’s creation accounts in **Job**

38⁸ where they aren't concerned with sequence. The point is, just like last week, the verse is not easy to translate; you have to make a decision. For our purposes today, it doesn't make a big difference. I'm more interested in **what is in** this verse today. There is the **earth** which is said to **without form** and **void**. There is **darkness**. There is the parallel "face of the deep" and "face of the waters." Finally, there is the **Spirit of God hovering**.

Without Form and Void

If **vs. 1** focused on the totality of the universe (heavens and earth), **vs. 2** telescopes in on the earth. It tells us that the earth is in a very strange state. It is without form and void. In Hebrew it reads, "*tohu wabohu*." You immediately hear the rhyme. It is possibly a figure of speech that we call **hendiadys**,⁹ like "**bread and butter**" (basic food) or "**good and warm**" (pleasantly warm). We may even have a kind of

⁸ I counted no less than 25 of them in this chapter (38:7, 8, 9, 10(x2), 11(x2), 13, 14, 15(x2), 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 25, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 38, and 39). Many are found starting the second half of poetic couplet, but there are at least four (vv. 8, 10, 11, 15) that begin the sentence. The point is, they clearly are not concerned with temporal sequence. See Collin Robinson Cornell, "God and the Sea in Job 38," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, Vol. 12, Art 18 (2012): 1-15. http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_180.pdf where he argues that the "and" in the middle of vs. 7 and the beginning of vs. 8 are waw-consecutives. He is not concerned with the others in his paper, but following his lead, the other's follow also as consecutives.

⁹ See Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. "The Spirit and Creation," in *Presence, Power, and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament*, ed. David G Firth and Paul D. Wegner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 74-76 [71-94].

equivalent to this very phrase when we say “**helter-skelter**” (disorderly haste). The idea is basically that the earth was **formless**—it needed forming; and it was **empty**—it needed filling. The translation in the ESV is perfectly acceptable.

Just here, we need to understand something very important about the ancient worldview. It is important, but it is quite bizarre to us. It may even cause you to shudder. This is not referring to **material emptiness** as much as it is to **functional emptiness**.¹⁰ You see, in the ancient mind, a thing had non-existence if it had no **function**, no **purpose**, and no **name**. Or, to put it positively, “**In the ancient world something came into existence when it was separated out as a distinct entity, given a function, and given a name.**”¹¹

This is difficult for us to understand, because we do not think like this at all. We are so influenced by a scientific worldview that we think of something as existing if we can touch it or see it or test it or make predictions about it. This has been going on increasingly in the West since the Greek philosophers, but the rest of the world simply wasn't concerned with these matters like we are. And Moses wrote a

¹⁰ This is Dr. John Walton's major thesis. You find it throughout his several books on Genesis.

¹¹ John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 88.

long time before Plato and Aristotle, much less Descartes or Bacon or Hobbes or Hume came along. “In the ancient Near East, something did not necessarily exist just because it happened to be occupying space.”¹² This is the consensus of OT Scholars and others who study the ancient world.¹³

To explain this, we want to see how other parts of the Bible use *tohu* and *bohu*. The desert and the limitless waters are two examples.¹⁴ For example, in Isaiah it speaks about Babylon saying, “The hawk and the porcupine shall possess it, the owl and the raven shall dwell in it. He shall stretch the line of confusion (*tohu*) over it, and the plumb line of emptiness (*bohu*)” (Isa 34:11). Is he saying that he is actually going to turn Babylon into the primordial soup? No, he is saying that it will become a desert, uninhabitable, useless, functionally pointless for any redeeming purpose whatsoever. In fact, in the next couple of verses he will describe this using a number of demonic creatures.¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Walton cites several sources.

¹⁴ E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 179–80; examples in *Contexts of Scripture* 1.8–16.

¹⁵ Taking my cue from the demons of **Revelation 18:2** (a commentary on this text) and various other translations, the next verse could be translated, “It shall be a home of dragons, an abode of monsters. Phantoms shall meet centaurs, satyrs shall greet each other; there also Lilith shall relax and find herself a resting place. The tree snake shall nest and lay eggs, and shall brood and hatch in its shade. There too the buzzards shall gather with one another.” See my *Giants: Sons of the Gods*, pp. 185-98.

Another example is found in Jeremiah 4 where he uses both words together with the image of de-creation. “For my people are foolish; they know me not; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. They are 'wise'-- in doing evil! But how to do good they know not.’²³ I looked on the earth, and behold, it was without form (tohu) and void (bohu); and to the heavens, and they had no light.²⁴ I looked on the mountains, and behold, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro.²⁵ I looked, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the air had fled.²⁶ I looked, and behold, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger” (Jer 4:22-26). Is Jeremiah saying that the sun was literally gone, or the mountains literally removed, or the men and birds literally obliterated? No. The point is the same as Isaiah’s. They have lost their function, the purpose for which they were created. In a very real sense, then, sin is viewed as a non-thing; not that it doesn’t exist *in our sense* (of course it does, and it has consequences), but that it is worthless for any good thing. Its only purpose is to be destroyed. The Flood story is another example of this, as it is pictured for us as a return to conditions of Genesis 1:2. We will see this in great detail when we come to that story.

A good word for what we have here would be **chaos**. It exists, but it is chaotic. In the Greek pantheon, the highest god is **Chaos**. In Babylon, chaos is personified in the monster **Tiamat**, who is also a goddess. But in the Bible, chaos is not divine; it is impersonal, it is not a god. It is a state of affairs that needs changing, reordering.

There is a very important verse in Moses' Song in Deuteronomy 32. It relates directly to **Genesis 1:2**. It says, "He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste (tohu) of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye" (**Deut 32:10**). Think about the Exodus story. They have just come through the sea, something Paul refers to as a baptism (**1 Cor 10:2**). Now they are in the desert, where God finds them. It isn't that they didn't exist before this. It is that now, they are in need of fundamental, functional transformation.

He is their Father who bought them (**vs. 6**). And notice, "He has made you and established you" (**6**). That is creation language, isn't it? How did he do this? The picture re-imagines Genesis 1. He takes him from the howling waste (**10**), the spirit hovers (**11**), God alone does it (**12**), he goes to the high places and eats the produce of the field (**13**), and from the animals (**14**). Now **they must worship him**.

They were slaves, now they are freemen. Egypt and Pharaoh, who are likened to Rahab and Leviathan, the great sea monsters or chaos monsters by Isaiah (Isa 30:7; 51:9-10), were their masters. Now, they have a new God, a new Lord. They need to be created a new. This is the work of the Spirit in Genesis 1:2—creation. As it says in the Psalms, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host” (Ps 33:6) and “When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground” (Ps 104:30). What God decides to do with Israel to precipitate this new creation, is give them a law and a tabernacle, a place where God will dwell with them and rule over them as they wander to the Promised Land.

Darkness and the Deep

I want us to think for a moment about **the darkness** and **the deep** of Genesis 1:2. Basic ancient cosmology (the way they understood the universe) was three-tiered. They talk about the heavens, the earth, and under the earth. For example, “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Php 2:10). Or, “And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it” (Rev 5:3).

Moses wrote the Ten Commandments (at least the second time around) “You shall not make for yourself a

carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Deut 5:8; cf. Ex 20:4). Notice how he puts it a little differently: *the water* under the earth. What does this mean, water under the earth?

Very briefly, they viewed it something like this, “They consider the earth to be a flat surface, whilst the heavens are a dome, a kind of glass shade which covers the earth and comes in contact with it at the horizon . . . [it was] flat and round below and surmounted above by a solid firmament in the shape of an inverted bowl.”¹⁶ Pillars held the sky up (Job 26:11), while the earth floated on an immense sea of water (Ps 136:6), which was connected all the way down to Sheol, and even below it, where the great sea monster lived. They described it the way they saw it, and God revealed himself to them in terms they would understand.

¹⁶ See Paul H. Seely, The Geographical Meaning of the ‘Earth’ and ‘Seas’ in Genesis 1:10, Westminster Theological Journal 59:2 (1997): 230 [230-55].



Calvin talked about this as divine accommodation, or what he called the **prattling babble of baby-talk**.¹⁷ He says that Moses “**accommodated his discourse to the received custom**” and “**accommodated his works to the capacity of men,**” fixing our attention and compelling us to pause and

¹⁷ David F. Wright, “Calvin’s Accommodating God,” in Wilhelm H. Neuser and Brian G. Armstrong, eds., *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex: Calvin as Protector of the Purer Religion* (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth-Century Essays & Studies, XXXVI 1997), 3–19.

reflect. He says that God told it to us this way “for our sake, to teach us that God has made nothing without a certain reason and design” and “the garniture of that theatre which he places before our eyes.”¹⁸

Whereas **Genesis 1:1** speaks of the heavens and the earth, and the beginning of **vs. 2** narrows down to just the earth, now we zoom even closer to the third-tier, the idea of under the earth or the surface of the deep.¹⁹ There are two different words for water in this verse. One is *tehom*—the “deep,” which is also *abussos* (Gk: abyss). The other is *mayim*—the “waters” which will soon become *yam*—the sea (**Gen 1:10**). Curiously, it is the deep where leviathan lives (**Job 41:32**; **Isa 51:9-10**). Just as curious, the abyss is where Satan is thrown for a thousand years (**Rev 20:2-3**). Moses sings of Pharaoh and his army, “The deep covered them” (**Ex 15:5**), and we have seen, Pharaoh is likened to the sea monster.

¹⁸ All in Calvin’s Commentary on Genesis, cited in Robert Letham, “In The Space Of Six Days”: The Days Of Creation From Origen To The Westminster Assembly, Westminster Theological Journal 61:2 (1999): 166 [149-74].

¹⁹ There is a rough parallel of this throughout the chapter. God creates the heavens (day 1) and then fills them (day 4). He separates the sky and sea (day 2) and then fills them (day 5). He forms the dry land (day 3) and then fills it (day 6)—Heaven above, earth below, and the earth that we walk upon. This is the basic idea of the so-called Framework view, a literary reading of Genesis 1. It has its exegetical roots here in this three-fold division and its historical roots at least as far back as Aquinas (1225-1274). See Letham, pp. 162-63.

Why all this talk about a sea monster? For one reason, it is because he is found in so many of the other biblical creation accounts. For another reason, he is found later on in **Genesis 1:21** where God creates the sea monsters. But the last reason is to help you understand the context a little better. Listen to the ideas of the pagans.

In Mesopotamia, **the Abyss is the god Apsu**. He is one of the two primary or first gods of creation in the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation epic. The other is **Tiamat, the sea monster**. The story begins,

“When on high no name was given to heaven,
Nor below was the netherworld called by name,
Primeval **Apsu** (fresh water) was their progenitor,
And matrix—**Tiamat** (salt water/sea monster) was she
who bore them all,
They were mingling their waters together.”

Later in the story, the god **Marduk** takes Tiamat’s body, ties her tail in “**the Great Bond**” (*EE* 5.59) to the sky, and uses her body, which he cuts in half, half to form land and the mountains which hold up the sky, and the other half to form the sea. All this while, “**You shine with horns to make six days, At the seventh day, the disk as half**” (*EE* 5.16-17). A

creation story with chaos, waters, sea monsters, heaven and earth, six and seven. **But in Genesis, none of this is personified.** None of it is a god. There is only one God, and the Spirit of God is hovering over it, ruling, presiding, watching, working. This Spirit is not a different God, but the Spirit of God.

He must do this work because the scene is one of chaos shrouded by darkness. How should we think of this darkness? Again, let other Scripture help us. Later in the Bible, **darkness evokes everything that is anti-God:** the wicked (**Prov 2:13**), judgment (**Ex 10:21**), death (**Ps 88:13**).²⁰ Darkness becomes the very first thing that God will deal with beginning in the next verse. In Greek mythology, darkness (actually “night” named as such) is one of the first children born to Chaos. Yet, biblically, we realize that darkness is something *God creates*. **“I form the light and create darkness”** (**Isa 45:7**). It is not an entity on its own, much less is it a divine being or some equal opposite force of God such as in the yin-yang. God is its ruler.

In that verse, darkness is parallel with moral evil. Not that God is evil or does evil, but he is sovereign over it and the **first cause of everything**. The chaos of darkness will be

²⁰ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 16.

overcome. The Gospel of John picks up the darkness theme of Genesis 1:2 and turns it into moral evil. Not that there is moral evil here in Genesis 1:1 (unless Satan's fall occurred here, something possible, but for me, doubtful). But rather, we must see that darkness is not something God likes. In his world, **darkness serves no good function**. He is not a God of darkness, but of light. So, even the night will have "lights" (as opposed to gods).

The Work of the Spirit

But **what is this work that the Spirit does?** Notice, he is hovering, like a bird. It is for this reason that I prefer "spirit" rather than the possible "wind" or "breath" of God. Also, other passages clearly link the Spirit of the Exodus, which is itself linked back to Genesis 1:2 (see **Isa 63:10-11**). The most important one occurs one verse after something we have already looked at.

"He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions" (**Deut 32:10-11**). Not only is *tohu* used here, so is the same word for "hover." In fact, the word is only used three times in the entire Bible. **This is a deliberate reflection** of the Exodus upon Genesis 1:2.

In what other places is the Spirit likened to a bird over water? Well, there is the deliberate parallelism between the dove that **Noah** sends out (on the seventh day) over the water. Peter refers to the Flood as a kind of **baptism** (1 Pet 3:21). Then there is the Holy Spirit coming upon **Jesus** at his **baptism** in the Jordan River (Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32). And, of course, **Moses** sings about the Spirit finding them in the wilderness immediately after their baptism through the Red Sea. **Baptism!**

This is why the Father's thought like this. But it wasn't only them. They weren't just doing creative allegory. I was stunned to see this in the **Athahasis epic**, a creation story of the Sumerians. Atra-Hasis was one of the fabled kings of Sumer who lived before the Flood. It reads this way,

Enki made ready to speak,

(205) And said to the great gods:

“On the first, seventh, and fifteenth days of the month,^{5 b}

Let me establish a purification, a bath.

Let one god be slaughtered,

⁵ (original note) I.e, the new moon, the first quarter, and the full moon, the principal lunar festivals of Old Babylonian times. The last was called *šapattu* in Akk., and it is possible that the original meaning of Heb. *šabbat* was the same; see Hallo 1977 and Epic of Creation (above, text 1.111) V 14–18 and n. 10.

^b (original note) 2 Kgs 4:23; Isa 1:13; 66:23

Then let the gods be cleansed by immersion.

(210) Let Nintu mix clay with his flesh and blood.²¹

Creation and baptism and sevens.

The Babylonians and Assyrians later put something in their temples. There were certain tanks of holy water in the temple courtyards. They were called abzu or *apsu*, a name we have seen as a water god of creation. This is similar to what Cyril noticed about the laver in the tabernacle. In fact, Solomon, who had his own version of the laver in his temple called it “the sea” (1 Kgs 7:23-25). Curiously, when God “gathers” the waters together in Genesis 1:10, he calls them seas. And the word for “gather” here is the word *mikveh*, which is the Jewish equivalent of Christian baptism. Indeed, the priests would wash/baptize themselves in Solomon’s sea for ritual purification and ordination. It was a 10,000 gallon gigantic *mikveh*.

So what does all of this mean? Let’s use some of the words we have seen. Tertullian spoke of “furnishing the world.” Calvin spoke of “the garniture of that theatre.” Garniture is decorative accessories. One of these we have seen is the laver or the sea and these belong to temples.

²¹ William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 1997–), 451.

Sevens belong in temples. Rest belongs in temples, as we will see in a later sermon. “Heaven is my throne, earth is my footstool,” Isaiah (66:1) says.

What is the Spirit presiding over? God is building for himself a temple. This is what Genesis 1 will describe. This is the function God is creating out of the chaos. Psalm 78:69 puts it exactly. “He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever.” Philo wrote, “The whole universe must be regarded as the highest and, in truth, the holy temple of God” (Philo, *De spec. leg.* 1:66). This is simply how the whole world understood creation once upon a time.

In the Baal Cycle it reads, Kothar shall wash me | In the h[ouse of Prince] Yamm | In the palace of Judge River (KTU 1.2:3:20-21).²² In the Emar rituals a seven-day feast commences with the priestess settling in her new residence on the last day.²³ In the Gilgamesh epic (the Babylonian flood story), Gilgamesh builds his “house” saying, “I decked her in six, I divided her in seven . . . on the seventh day the ship was

²² Mark S. Smith and Simon B. Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, vol. 9, Writings from the Ancient World (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 97.

²³ See Storm God’s High Priestess (1.122). William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 1997–), 427.

completed.”²⁴ And where does it go? To the waters. In the **Enuma Elish**, Marduk says, “A house I shall build, let it be the abode of my pleasure | Within it I shall establish its holy place | I shall appoint my (holy) chambers, I shall establish my kingship” (EE 5.122-24).²⁵ By the way, the EE is written, deliberately, on **seven tablets**.

The Sumerian **Gudea** reads, “[Gu]dea, you were building my [house] for me | And were having [the offices] performed to perfection [for me] | You had [my house] shine for me | Like Utu in [Heaven’s midst] | **Separating**. Like a lofty foothill range | **Heaven from earth**.”²⁶ In **Egypt**, “The temple recalled a mythical place, the primeval mound. It stood on the first soil that emerged from the primeval waters, on which the creator god stood to begin his work of creation. Through a long chain of ongoing renewals, the present temple was the direct descendant of the original sanctuary that the creator god himself had erected on the primeval

²⁴ William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 1997–), 459.

²⁵ William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 1997–), 400.

²⁶ Gudea B.xx.8-11 translated by Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once . . .* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 441-42.

mound. An origin myth connecting the structure with creation is associated with each of the larger late temples.²⁷

It doesn't matter if you go down to India or across the sea to the American Indians. Everyone relates the story the same way, because they all remember the truth of the function, though they pervert the one who made it. **What is the essential point of Genesis 1:2?** It is that earth and chaos and the deep are not gods. **The Holy Spirit is.** He isn't the great spirit, one God in one Person, as the American Indians seem to have believed (though they too speak of him as a bird such as a raven). He is the Spirit of God, the breath of his mouth, the life of his Word. As the Psalms say again, **"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host"** (Ps 33:6) and **"When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground"** (Ps 104:30). This is the God of Genesis 1 (we will meet the Word next week). This is the work our God is doing.

Isaiah says, **"For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty [*tohu*], he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the LORD, and there is no other"** (Isa

²⁷ Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 38.

45:18). The point is, the story begins, as it does with Deut 32, with God finding the earth *tohu wabohu*. God indeed created all things, but the stories tell of God finding these conditions and then creating, forming, and making them habitable and good. **You are those he has chosen to inhabit his world.** You are those he has chosen to place in his holy sanctuary this day, to hear his word and to respond accordingly. This is the work of God's Spirit.

If you see that God is the God of creation, and understand that he is creating a temple for his pleasure and his kingship, but if you have not confessed him as king and been baptized, then you must do so, or be thrown into the abyss wherein there lurks Satan and his horrible monster cohorts. The verse is **a call** to you **to turn to the God** you know, once and for all, in faith. If creation shows us anything, it shows us that we already know the truth of who this God is, for the powers he displays at creation are evident to all people (**Rom 1:18ff**). But in his special word, he offers himself to any who will come, who hear the good news of the Word made flesh, baptized and overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, dead, buried, and raised again, ascended into heaven.

For you who have, now turn your gaze to this creation. See it for what it is, and not for what the pagans pretend it to be. Do not worship the creation, but rather, the Creator:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Consider how ancient is the mystery of baptism that, as the Father's put it, "illuminates" you and lets you see. Consider how happy is our sacrament of water. Consider how this water has created functional purpose, like calling Israel to be his own. Consider how God has washed away your sins. Consider how he has formed the world to be inhabited by you, and placed you on his holy temple mount, giving you such high privilege that even angels became jealous. Consider the work that God is about to perform in Genesis 1 and the work he now gives you to do as his priest-princes, called to keep yourselves pure and clean and to be ambassadors of his realm, until Christ returns in Glory.