

*Genesis 1:6-8*

One of God's greatest gifts to man, a gift that almost daily shouts His glory and beauty, is His creation of clouds. Something that reinforces the majesty and grandeur of our God is beholding either the early morning or fading daylight appearance of clouds painted in the golds and pinks and purples of dawn or sunset—or the overwhelming mountains of dark and ominous thunderclouds that speak so eloquently of His might. Here, in these moments, is the Lord God speaking to us through the rather mundane element of common water vapor.

Lest we forget, however, the *operative* element in these heavenly displays—that which is responsible for their beauty—is not the vapor itself, but the sun, and very often the condition of the atmosphere between our vision and the clouds themselves.

At this moment in the Creation narrative, the element of *light* has been created (v3), but not the star created to carry that light to earth: the sun (vv16-18). Thus as we examine God's creative acts during the "second day," we must keep in mind that He will have not yet created the colorful symphony we today enjoy as we gaze toward the western or eastern horizon.

**Read Genesis 1:6-8.**

v6

Perhaps there is no other passage in Scripture that cries out so for clear definition of its words than vv6-7 of Genesis Chapter One—especially in some of the older versions. Verse 6 in the KJV reads

**And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.**

I don't know about you, but whenever I read the word "firmament" I imagine, not surprisingly, something *firm*, solid, like a rock escarpment. And whenever I read "divide the waters from the waters" I imagine it speaks of something like what happens in v9:

**Then God said, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so.**

Verse 9 says, let dry land suddenly appear to separate the water in one sea from the water in another sea. But, of course, neither of these—a rock escarpment and vast oceans—describe what is happening in vv6-7.


*Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters,*

Here is a classic example of how someone in the 1600s reading the word “firmament” in their King James Bible would have an absolutely correct image in their mind, while many of us today do not. Most of our common versions have settled on the word “expanse,” while the newer NIV has, bless its heart, reverted to simply another, somewhat archaic reference: “vault.”

We must remind ourselves of the current condition of the created earth, which is (at this point in the narrative) completely covered with surging water, and completely dark. Added to this is the Spirit of God taking part in the creative process.

### **Read Genesis 1:2.**

In two words, the entire earth is wet and dark. But now, in v6 something new is about to happen—and although we cannot say for certain, for Scripture does not state it beyond later oblique references, such as in Psalm 33 and Exodus 31—we can make the assumption that the Holy Spirit will be active in the actions of v6.

The Hebrew *raqia* was historically translated firmament or vault. The root of the word means to hammer and spread out;  we get the word “firmament” from the translation of the Vulgate (Latin Bible) *firmamentum*, which involves the idea of something firmly put in place. In antiquity this firmament was thought to be a literal, solid dome or vault overhead. And when one thinks about it, the colorful opinions of many in history for what we would simply call “the sky”—that is, the immediate atmosphere overhead, where the birds fly—is a rather remarkable invention of our God.

*Leupold:* The *raqia*’ is the vault or dome of the heavens, or "that immense gaseous ocean, called the atmosphere, by which the earth is encircled" (Whitelaw). That so widely differing definitions as "dome" and "gaseous ocean" can be given in one breath is due to the fact, that whole set of physical laws is involved which makes the lower heavens possible: an air space encircling the earth, evaporation of waters, rising of gaseous vapours, etc.

We might imagine that up till this moment in the Creation the earth waters on the surface and the cloud waters (vapors), as we would recognize them, were contiguous—that is without any intervening clear space between them (Leupold). Remember, step-by-step, the Godhead is systematically preparing the surface of the earth for its inhabitants. With the surface of the earth, as we suppose, shrouded by continuous, impenetrable fog, it would be unsuitable for human habitation.

#### ***raqia***

Think of these modern, one-piece, seamless cans or aluminum bottles that begin life as a simple metal disk. The disk is set into a press, which then pushes and spreads the metal into an extended shape, thinning it along the way.

*and let it separate the waters from the waters.”*

Similar to what was done with light and darkness in v4, the two “waters” are now separated—this time, however, they are separated *by* something: an expanse, a firmament, a vault. We know from practical experience that this expanse is not a rigid, impenetrable dome over the surface of the earth. Clouds can ascend and descend through it, rain and hail and snow can descend through it, and rockets can ascend and descend through it. But there is a distinct layer of atmosphere between earth’s surface and space, and during the Creation this meant a lifting of the vaporous clouds from the waters on the surface.

vv7-8

**So God made the expanse and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. And God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. ❏**

Verse 7 essentially reiterates the work in v6, but does so emphasizing that God accomplished what He set out to do. In v6 He “said”; in v7 He “made,” closing the verse with “and it was so”—that is, it happened, His audible command accomplished its purpose. Some commentators like to differentiate between the v6 “God said” and v7 “God made,” taking the position that the first states a *verbal* creating, while the second states a *mechanical* creating. That distinction isn’t necessary; the two together simple mean that God “made” something by speaking it into existence. We can rely upon Charles Haddon Spurgeon to make a more devotional application to the text.

*Spurgeon:* Note those four words, “and it was so.” Whatever God ordains always comes. You will find that it is true of all his promises that, whatever he has said, shall be fulfilled to you, and you shall one day say of it all, “and it was so.” It is equally certain concerning all his threatenings that what he has spoken shall certainly be fulfilled, and the ungodly will have to say “and it was so.” These words are often repeated in this chapter. They convey to us the great lesson that the word of God is sure to be followed by the deed of God. He speaks, and it is done.

As to what has been accomplished during this second day of Creation, let’s check in with John Sailhamer (with whom, for once, I agree—in part).

*Sailhamer:* We must be careful neither to let our own view of the structure of the universe nor what we might think to have been the view of ancient men control our understanding of the biblical author’s description of the “expanse.” We must seek what clues there are from the biblical text itself. One such clue is the purpose that the author assigns to the “expanse” in v6: it is “to separate water from water.” The “expanse” holds water above the land; that much is certain.

### ***below...above***

Note carefully what is being said here. Since I sometimes make this mistake myself, it is possible others do as well: The water we see overhead (in the form of clouds) does not dwell *in* what is called the “expanse”—the division being created here. No, they dwell “above the expanse.”

Verse 7 expands on this, adding more specificity from the initial statement of v6.

We must be cautious, however, with something else Sailhamer says. In referencing v8—specifically, “And God called the expanse [or heaven or sky]” (depending on your version). The Hebrew is *samayim* (sha-MY-eem) and Sailhamer states that “*Here* the term refers not only to the place where God put the sun, moon, and stars (v14) but also to that place where the birds fly (v20” (emphasis added). No, used in v8 is a word that in Hebrew usage *can* be used to refer to either the sky or space—even God’s dwelling place. But here, in v8, it refers to the sky—as in v20, a place where the “birds fly above the earth.” There is no water in space; but there *is* water in the clouds and the atmosphere immediately above the earth. We can agree that what is referenced in this passage is what we call, the “sky.”

### THREE HEAVENS

This business of there being three entities called by the same name —“heaven”—can be confusing. Let’s take a few minutes to see what God’s word says about this.

#### *The First, or Lowest Heaven (earth’s sky)*

This current passage in Genesis One describes this first heaven, referring to it as an expanse. Elihu, the companion of Job, in Chapter Thirty-five uses the same Hebrew word when he says,

**“Look at the heavens and see;  
And perceive the clouds—they are higher than you.” (Job 35:5)**

The Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *samayim* is *ouranos* (ur-ah-NOS), and it is used in Matthew’s gospel to denote the place where the birds fly—in all our common versions translated “air.”

### **Read Matthew 6:26.**

This is the first, or lowest heaven; the one closest to the earth.

#### *The Second Heaven (space)*

The next heaven is what we would call space—everything above the earth’s upper atmosphere (the “expanse” of Genesis 1:8). Since we are in Matthew, look at Matthew 5:18, in which Jesus (probably) refers to “the heavens” or space.

**“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”**

### **Read Isaiah 45:12.**



I believe Acts 2:19 (part of Peter’s sermon) also refers to space; I take slight issue with the NASB and LSB translation of *ouranos* here as “sky,” since it is clearly referring to celestial objects.

**‘And I will put wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke.’**

Perhaps the rationale is that the phenomena will be seen, from earth, in the sky overhead.

### *The Third or Highest Heaven (God’s dwelling place)*

Ancient Hebrews referred to the highest heaven also as the “heaven of heavens.” The apostle Paul referred to it as the “third heaven” and “Paradise” (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). Moses tells Israel that this is where Yahweh lives.

### **Read Deuteronomy 26:15.**

Jesus said that this is where the angels live, along with the Son and the Father.

**“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” (Mark 13:31–32)**

Finally, let’s read a passage of praise in the Psalms that includes at least two—perhaps all three—of the heavens.

### **Read Psalms 148:1-5.**

Now back to our passage in Genesis. This work of the second day will have world-wide ramifications for climate and ecology. Henry Morris points out that had the waters *not* been separated,

- i. [The contiguous waters] would serve as a global greenhouse, maintaining an essentially uniformly pleasant temperature all over the world.
- ii. Without great temperature variations, there would be no significant winds, and the water-rain cycle could not form. There would be no rain as we know it today.
- iii. There would be lush, tropical-like vegetation, all over the world, fed not by rain, but by a rich evaporation and condensation cycle, resulting in heavy dew or ground-fog.
- iv. The vapor blanket would filter out ultraviolet radiation, cosmic rays, and other destructive energies bombarding the planet. These are known to be the cause of mutations, which decrease human longevity. Human and animal life spans would be greatly increased. (source: Guzik)

*And God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.*

God naming something is no small thing. As we will see as the Creative narrative proceeds, naming things is important with God; it *means* something—to Him, and thus should to us as well. He will either name things Himself, or see to it that they are named by others.

He has already named day and night (v5); the expanse He has named heaven (8); in v10 He will name “the dry land earth” and “the gathering of the waters,” seas; and in 2:19 Yahweh God will present to the first man “every beast of the field and every bird of the sky” this time for the *man* to name.

I don’t mean to make more of this than there is, but at the least we know from Scripture that someone’s or something’s name is more than just a handy label for reference, but represents what that person or thing actually is, enveloping their character, their potential.

*Spurgeon:* It is a good thing to have the right names for things... It is a good thing also to know the names of truths, and the names of other things that are right. God is very particular in the Scripture about giving people their right names. The Holy Spirit says, “Judas, not Iscariot,” so that there should be no mistake about the person intended. Let us also always call persons and things by their right names: “And God called the expanse heaven.”

#### WHAT IS IN A NAME?

The meteorologist knows that there is a specific, natural explanation for every drop of rain and every flake of snow that falls from the sky. The naturalist can expound at length about the climatic and seasonal influences upon deciduous trees that cause them to drop their leaves every year. But the *poet* knows that above science is heaven—and the hand of God. The believer knows that even before He created man, God created (and thus controls) science. Science may have its rules, but God created the rules; clouds may form according to natural laws, but God created those laws.

So maybe it is a good thing that the closest of the three heavens—the one so close we can almost touch it, and certainly feel its effects—has been named by God, “heaven.” For by its name it associates it *with* God; it may not be where He dwells (third heaven), and it is, by nature, more of earth than space (second heaven), but it is above and over us, and thus reminds us of the One who made it and named it: the *God* who is above and over all.

# SESSION 8

## The First Heaven Genesis 1:6-8

### The Expanse (firmament)

The Hebrew *raqia* was historically translated firmament or vault. The root of the word means to hammer and spread out; we get the word “firmament” from the translation of the Vulgate (Latin Bible) *firmamentum*, which involves the idea of something firmly put in place. In antiquity this firmament was thought to be a literal, solid dome or vault overhead. And when one thinks about it, the colorful opinions of many in history for what we would simply call “the sky”—that is, the immediate atmosphere overhead, where the birds fly—is a rather remarkable invention of our God.

*Leupold:* The *raqia* is the vault or dome of the heavens, or “that immense gaseous ocean, called the atmosphere, by which the earth is encircled” (Whitelaw). That so widely differing definitions as “dome” and “gaseous ocean” can be given in one breath is due to the fact, that whole set of physical laws is involved which makes the lower heavens possible: an air space encircling the earth, evaporation of waters, rising of gaseous vapours, etc.

### Climate and Ecology

Henry Morris points out that had the waters *not* been separated,

- i. [The contiguous waters] would serve as a global greenhouse, maintaining an essentially uniformly pleasant temperature all over the world.
- ii. Without great temperature variations, there would be no significant winds, and the water-rain cycle could not form. There would be no rain as we know it today.
- iii. There would be lush, tropical-like vegetation, all over the world, fed not by rain, but by a rich evaporation and condensation cycle, resulting in heavy dew or ground-fog.
- iv. The vapor blanket would filter out ultraviolet radiation, cosmic rays, and other destructive energies bombarding the planet. These are known to be the cause of mutations, which decrease human longevity. Human and animal life spans would be greatly increased. (source: Guzik)

See chart of the Three Heavens on back

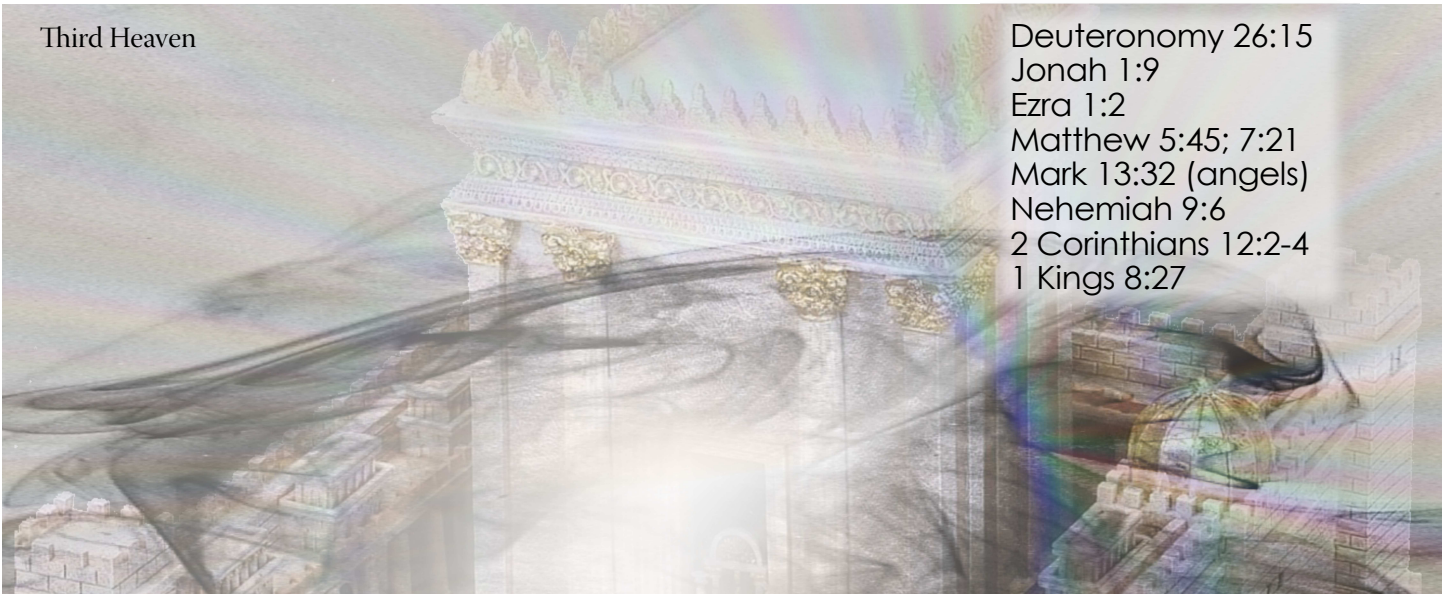
For complete notes and audios for each session, go to [DLAMPEL.COM/BIBLE-STUDIES/](http://DLAMPEL.COM/BIBLE-STUDIES/)





Third Heaven

Deuteronomy 26:15  
Jonah 1:9  
Ezra 1:2  
Matthew 5:45; 7:21  
Mark 13:32 (angels)  
Nehemiah 9:6  
2 Corinthians 12:2-4  
1 Kings 8:27



Second Heaven

Genesis 14:19 (1:1)  
Jeremiah 10:12  
Isaiah 45:12  
Acts 2:19 (sky = ouranou)  
Psalm 148:1-5



First Heaven

Genesis 1:6-8  
Job 35:5  
Matthew 6:26  
(air = heaven = ouranou)

