

## The Bible and the Environment

A lecture by Richard Bauckham

### Genesis 1 – Six Days of Creation

(full text overleaf)

Environments + Names	Inhabitants + Tasks
<p>(Day 1) light – separated from darkness  <i>God saw that it was good</i>            God names: Day and Night</p>	<p>(Day 4) heavenly lights            Tasks: to separate day from night, to give light, to rule  <i>God saw that it was good</i></p>
<p>(Day 2) firmament – separates waters            God names: Sky</p>	<p>(Day 5) Water produced water creatures            Birds in sky  <i>God saw that it was good</i>            God blessed them            Task: to be fruitful and fill</p>
<p>(Day 3) dry land – by gathering waters            God names: Earth and Sea  <i>God saw that it was good</i>            Earth produced vegetation  <i>God saw that it was good</i></p>	<p>(Day 6) Earth produces land creatures  <i>God saw that it was good</i>            Humans created in God's image            God blessed them            Tasks: (a) to be fruitful and fill and subdue the earth (b) to have dominion over the creatures of days (5) and (6). All creatures of days (5) and (6) are to live from the vegetation of day (3).   <i>God saw all that he had made and it was very good</i></p>

#### Summary on Genesis 1 and the human dominion:

- (1) The world is not anthropocentric; it is not all created simply for human use. God values and delights in all the manifold variety of his innumerable creatures.
- (2) Humans have the right to make use of their environment in order to survive and to flourish, but they do not have an exclusive right. We share the world with other creatures of God. We must leave room for them to flourish too.
- (3) Humans have a unique role of caring responsibility for other living creatures, but it is a role to be exercised within creation, a role that we exercise not as demi-gods over creation, but as creatures in relation to our fellow-creatures.
- (4) The world has a God-given order that requires our respect. We are not demi-gods with a godlike ability to re-create the world as we may wish. We are creatures, marvellously gifted and extraordinarily competent creatures, but creatures nonetheless. We must work with the created order of the world, not against it.

### Genesis 1:3-2:2 (NRSV)

**[Day 1]** <sup>3</sup>Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

**[Day 2]** <sup>6</sup>And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." <sup>7</sup>So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. <sup>8</sup>God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

**[Day 3]** <sup>9</sup>And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup>Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. <sup>12</sup>The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

**[Day 4]** <sup>14</sup>And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, <sup>15</sup>and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. <sup>16</sup>God made the two great lights--the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night--and the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, <sup>18</sup>to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

**[Day 5]** <sup>20</sup>And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." <sup>21</sup>So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup>God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." <sup>23</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

**[Day 6]** <sup>24</sup>And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. <sup>25</sup>God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>26</sup>Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." <sup>27</sup>So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup>God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." <sup>29</sup>God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup>And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. <sup>31</sup>God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

**[Day 7]** <sup>2:1</sup>Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. <sup>2</sup>And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

## The human relationship to the rest of creation - three biblical themes

(1) **the human dominion** – God has given humans a responsibility of care for other living creatures.

Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8:5-8

(‘vertical’ relationship)

(2) **the community of creation** – Humans and other creatures form, as fellow-creatures, an interdependent community under God.

Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 104; Matthew 6:25-34; Romans 8:18-23

(‘horizontal’ relationship)

(3) **the worship of all creation** – When humans worship God they join in the praise that all creatures offer to God.

Psalm 148; 19:1-34; 97:6; 98:7-8; Philippians 2:10; Revelation 5:13

(‘horizontal’ relationship)

## Other biblical themes (not discussed in this lecture)

(1) **cosmic humility** – The world does not revolve around us, and God’s purposes in the world exceed our understanding.

Job 38-41

(2) **Christ and creation** – Jesus Christ is both creator and redeemer of the whole creation.

John 1:1-14; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:2-3

(3) **new creation** – God’s purpose for his whole creation is to redeem it from evil and transitoriness and to renew it for eternal life in his presence.

Romans 8:18-23; Revelation 21:1-22:5

## For further reading:

Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd/Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010)

Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011/Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012)

Visit my website: [richardbauckham.co.uk](http://richardbauckham.co.uk)

## Humans within the Community of Creation in the Psalms

### God's Ecological Community

#### Psalm 104

- <10> You make springs gush forth in the valleys;  
they flow between the hills,  
<11> giving drink to every wild animal;  
the wild asses quench their thirst.  
<12> By the streams the birds of the air have their  
habitation;  
they sing among the branches.  
<13> From your lofty abode you water the mountains;  
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your  
work.  
<14> You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,  
and plants for people to use,  
to bring forth food from the earth,  
<15> and wine to gladden the human heart,  
oil to make the face shine,  
and bread to strengthen the human heart.  
<16> The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly,  
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.  
<17> In them the birds build their nests;  
the stork has its home in the fir trees.  
<18> The high mountains are for the wild goats;  
the rocks are a refuge for the coney.  
<19> You have made the moon to mark the seasons;  
the sun knows its time for setting.  
<20> You make darkness, and it is night,  
when all the animals of the forest come  
creeping out.  
<21> The young lions roar for their prey,  
seeking their food from God.  
<22> When the sun rises, they withdraw  
and lie down in their dens.  
<23> People go out to their work  
and to their labour until the evening.  
<24> O LORD, how manifold are your works!  
In wisdom you have made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.  
<25> Yonder is the sea, great and wide,  
creeping things innumerable are there,  
living things both small and great.  
<26> There go the ships,  
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.  
<27> These all look to you  
to give them their food in due season;  
<28> when you give to them, they gather it up;  
when you open your hand, they are filled  
with good things.  
<29> When you hide your face, they are dismayed;  
when you take away their breath, they die

### The Praise of God by all Creation

#### Psalm 148

- Praise the LORD!  
Praise the LORD from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights!  
<2> Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his host!  
<3> Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars!  
<4> Praise him, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!  
<5> Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for he commanded and they were created.  
<6> He established them forever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be  
passed.  
<7> Praise the LORD from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,  
<8> fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!  
<9> Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!  
<10> Wild animals and all cattle,  
creeping things and flying birds!  
<11> Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!  
<12> Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!  
<13> Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.  
<14> He has raised up a horn for his people,  
praise for all his faithful,  
for the people of Israel who are close to him.

Praise the LORD!