

To Bring Forth Fruit

by Ray C. Stedman

Our study in Genesis 1 now takes us to the third day of creation. In this great opening chapter of the Scripture we are learning something of *how* God made the world, but more primarily *why* God made the heavens and the earth.

And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day. {Gen 1:9-13 RSV}

Notice that this section falls very naturally into two major divisions. There is,

- First, the emergence of the land from the oceans; and
- Second, the first appearance of life upon the earth in the form of plant life – plants, trees, and vegetation.

In this passage, as throughout this entire first chapter in Genesis, there are provided for us certain clues which indicate something of the scientific processes which may have been involved in the formation of these things and which reveal to us the extreme scientific accuracy of this account. It is

not that science is the final test of Scripture – I do not mean to imply that – but where science has discovered fact, Scripture, if it be the revelation of God, must certainly be in accord. It is fascinating to go through this chapter and follow these clues to see how they bring out the large and general agreement with the factual discoveries of science.

Learn to investigate the Scriptures in this manner, utilizing clues much as if you were Perry Mason tracking down a criminal. This is what makes the study of the Scriptures fascinating. It can even have its aspects of horror and fright. If you like to be frightened by a mystery story there are passages in Scripture that will accommodate you. But here I would urge you to track down some of these amazingly interesting scientific clues:

1. For instance, we are told that God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” The waters were to be gathered together into one unbroken unit. If you put yourself in the place of a human observer in the day when Moses was given this revelation, you will realize that it would be most difficult for an observer of that day to know this to be true. He might have had occasion to visit one or more areas where he could see the oceans but it would have been almost impossible for him to have known that all the oceans were together into one place. Yet anyone with a modern globe, or a knowledge of the earth, knows this to be a fact.
2. Second, we are told that the continents were once submerged beneath the oceans. The words of the 104th Psalm remarkably describe this:

**Thou didst cover it with the deep as
with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At thy rebuke they fled;
at the sound of thy thunder they took
to flight.
The mountains rose, the valleys sank
down
to the place which thou didst appoint
for them. {Psa 104:6-8 RSV}**

In this very beautifully poetic passage we have an extremely accurate scientific statement. Science has long ago discovered that the earth has indeed been under the oceans, and in certain places this has occurred many times. Further, there is considerable evidence that all of the land was once one great undivided mass.

I remember sitting in grade school as a boy, dreaming away the hours and waiting for school to be over. There was a large map of the earth hung in the front of the school room. I had a lot of mental fun in trying to piece together all of the continents like a jigsaw puzzle. Even that early in life I noted an evident conformity in the coastlines of the continents and that they did fit together.

The theory of continental drift holds that once they were one great mass, but were later divided and drifted to their present locations. This original unity is suggested here, and the drift theory is confirmed by other Biblical and scientific evidence. I only mention this in passing to show again the remarkable agreement here with much that science has discovered.

3. A third scientific clue in this section is the statement that God called the waters *Seas* – not *sea*, singular, but *seas*, plural. It meant that though the ocean was one connected body of water, so that sea level is approximately the same anywhere in the world, yet the oceans themselves were divided into large bodies called *seas*; and this we know, of course, to be true. But I point this out again because we are commonly told that Genesis 1 is a primitive document, and reflects mythological legends and ideas. Yet, when you actually investigate what it says, you discover that the knowledge that is revealed here is not primitive at all. It is very up to date. Genesis 1 is thoroughly rele-

vant today and is as meaningful and accurate in its scientific aspects as it is in its moral or religious views.

The act of God in calling the land up out of the oceans seems to mark the period of evening in this third day. Remember that each of these days of creation consists of an evening and a morning; an evening which is incomplete, imperfect, unfinished, merging into that which is perfect and complete according to the phase that God desired for the earth at this time. During this period we have the rising of the continents, the weathering of the rocks and the soil forming gradually to make preparation for the plant life that is to follow.

But remember too that all this on the physical level is but a manifestation of a parallel spiritual and moral reality. If we do not study Genesis with that well in mind we will miss the great purpose of this book. This first chapter is designed to introduce and lead us into the great themes that run all the rest of the way through Scripture. So it is not a mere spiritualizing allegoricalism to find a spiritual meaning in these things. It is clear from the entire presentation of Scripture that God has designed the physical world to represent the unseen world to us. Every view of nature ought to speak volumes to us about who God is, what he does, and what he intends. These things are at once real and visible and, at the same time, the picture of something unseen which relates to our inner life.

- We have already seen that light and darkness picture the existence in the universe of good and evil. God calls the light *good* and he leaves the darkness undesignated. But if it is not called good then it must be the opposite – not good. Light and darkness, therefore, are the picture of good and evil.
- We saw also that the firmament of the heavens and the earth beneath manifest in spiritual import a life in heaven as well as a life on earth. Both of these are realities and man is terribly deprived if he does not understand this to be true. There is a visible life on earth, now, to be lived in time, but there is an unseen, invisible life as well. It is very important to keep that in mind.

- We learn that this human life on earth, between the period of birth and death, is itself divided. This is pictured for us by the rising of the land out of the ocean. As we saw earlier, the waters are a picture of human life. Rising up out of that ocean of humanity is land, which has the capability of producing fruit. Thus there exists that which is capable of producing fruit and that which is totally incapable of doing so.

This is the truth God wants us to know.

There is an old humanity which, by nature, is incapable of fulfilling what God desires; and a new humanity, called out of the old, which is capable of producing the fruit God envisions. The old humanity is all one fallen race – blinded, darkened, confused, bewildered, restless, and, as the ocean is one yet divided, so fallen humanity is separated into divisions: nations, peoples, and tongues. The prophet Isaiah says, “the wicked are like the waves of the sea when they are troubled and cannot rest, and their waters cast up mire and dirt,” {cf, Isa 57:20}.

You are asking perhaps, “Do you mean that all who are not Christians are wicked?” Essentially, I do mean that. We need to bear in mind that there is a respectable form of wickedness as well as a notorious form. You can be knowingly wicked, and you can be ignorantly wicked. If a human being is exposed to the knowledge of God’s purpose and God’s love and the program he has for the deliverance of humanity from its bondage, and that individual is resisting God’s work, as far as his own life is concerned, rejecting the Savior whom God has sent and refusing to yield to his gracious call, that person is clearly wicked. He is opposing God’s will. He is raising his fist in a defiant act against his Creator and Redeemer. That is also why he is restless. The world of our day is increasingly turbulent, breaking out constantly into violence and riots. The restlessness of our age is directly due to the fact that our age is wicked. It is pictured by the ocean with its wild surging waves that are never still.

But out of that ocean there comes a new humanity, the earth, a fruitful race of men in Jesus Christ, all one originally in him as the continents were once one, but now divided and fragmented by the forces that have come in since to separate us from one another. Yet there is an ever present un-

derlying unity which we discover when we come together.

I attended this past week a meeting in Wheaton, Illinois, which provided a wonderful example of that unity. We were from various denominations and backgrounds, various theological commitments and disciplines. Yet there was evident, as we met together, a wonderful sense of harmony. We were one in Jesus Christ. We were divided on the surface but one underneath. We had never met before but we were not strangers to each other the moment we met. This is the new humanity, and it alone is capable of producing the fruit that God desires, manifesting the life of God.

This is a truth that runs all the way through Scripture. Psalm 1 says:

**Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the un-
godly,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and in his law does he meditate day and
night.
He is like a tree
planted by the rivers of water,
that brings forth his fruit in his season.
{Psa 1:1-3a RSV}**

But then the Psalmist says,

**The ungodly [the wicked] are not so,
but are like chaff which the wind drives
away. {Psa 1:4 RSV}**

The wicked are restless, tied down to nothing, insecure, like the chaff driven before the wind. But the redeemed are fruitful – these are the two divisions of humanity.

You can see them also in the parables of our Lord: In the parable of the barren fig tree, he began with a man who owned a garden in which there was a fig tree planted – a tree expected to bring forth fruit. But when the owner came three years in a row and looked for fruit he found nothing but leaves, so he said to the gardener, “Cut it down. Why does it cumber the ground, why is it using up the soil? Cut it down,” {cf, Luke 13:6-9}. Remember, the gardener intervened on behalf of the tree, saying, “Let me have it for awhile, let me give it what it takes to bring forth the fruit. If it won’t

bring forth fruit then, cut it down.” In that incisive parable the Lord Jesus speaks of himself as the great Gardener of humanity.

Every one of us is like a fruit tree in the garden of God, and God is expecting fruit from our lives. That is why we are here. He puts us here for a purpose, since everything on earth is here for a purpose. What is the purpose God has for you and me? It is to produce fruit. We will say more in a moment as to what that fruit is. But remember also that closing scene of the Bible, in the 22nd chapter of Revelation, where John sees the new Jerusalem, the new city of God, coming down from heaven. Through the city flows the river of life, and on each side are trees which bring forth fruit twelve months out of the year – continuous fruit. That is what God is after. Here, in the very first chapter of Genesis, and there, in the closing chapter of the Book, there is one great connected theme – the fruit that God desires from the human race. It is made possible only through that which is represented by the earth.

For the moment let us return to the physical and material level for the rest of this passage, and look at certain other significant clues as to the scientific processes that may be involved. In Verse 11,

... God said, “Let the earth bring forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.” And it was so. {Gen 1:11 RSV}

You will notice that the earth is commanded to bring forth the fruit. That is highly significant. I do not know that I am capable of analyzing what it means, but it is evident that God did not make life *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), but, rather, commanded that which was already there to produce the life.

It is clear, therefore, that plant life arises from the earth and has some vital connection to it. It suggests, at least, that there was a combining of matter into a new and radically different form, which resulted at last in the highly complex organisms, in a vast range of species, that we are familiar with in the world of botany. But this was not done by chance as science so frequently tells us. It was by divine choice, by the word of God, that a rearrangement of that which was already there took place. But, if it was a rearrangement, it at least

suggests that it is subject to some degree of scientific investigation.

I know there are many today who are asking, “What if science produces life in the laboratory? These scientists are cooking up strange concoctions in their laboratories and no one knows what’s going to happen.” Many Christians seem to be trembling in fear against the day when that might happen. Let me try to allay your fears, if I may. If they do produce life – and they may – it will only mean that science has done what it has always been doing: simply retraced the steps that the Creator took. It will certainly not prove, as many think, that there is no need for a God in order to have life. It will, in fact, prove quite the opposite: it will show that you cannot have life without the intervention of some intelligence to put things together. Therefore we do not need to fear. Scientists today can synthesize the chemical makeup of plants in their laboratories, but, as yet, they are unable to infuse these with that mysterious quality called “life,” which makes them grow and reproduce, and act as living things.

Also, I will hastily add, this account does not suggest that Darwin was right about the origin of species. Darwin suggested that all life came from a single source, and, through a pattern of infinite modifications, came at last to embrace all the forms of life we know upon the earth today. But this account rather suggests that there were many simultaneous sources which were followed by creative leaps that developed within rather wide but very rigid boundaries. This is also what science is learning. It is interesting that the explorations of geologists have uncovered fossil oak trees said to be over a hundred million years old, and yet those oak trees are approximately identical with oak trees that grow here in California today. There is no change in a hundred million years. It is exceedingly interesting to note that the Bible tells us that plant life developed within very rigid patterns and did not overleap their bounds. Dr. F. O. Bower, in a book called *Evolution in The Light of Modern Knowledge* says,

It is quite gratuitous to assume that all life sprang from a single source. Many doubt whether, for the kingdom of plants at least, there was ever a single trunk or common source for all. Others assert most definitely that there was not.

A second scientific clue in this section tells us that there were three simple divisions of plant life recorded: vegetation (which includes moss, lichens, and other plants that do not propagate themselves by the use of seeds, e.g., ferns); seed-bearing plants (all the grasses and grains, etc.); and fruit (with the seed inside, i.e., pulpy-fruit fruit trees and other plants which produce fruit). This is a very helpful division for scientific purposes, but scientific knowledge is not the purpose of the Bible. In a moment or two we will see why the Bible divides the plant world into three divisions and that such division is in line with its major purpose.

But one other thing first – a word about this phrase, *according to kind*. I have already commented somewhat on it, but I want to point out that no one knows exactly what this means. It is becoming clear that it does not agree with any of the scientific divisions of life, such as species, family, order, or phylum, but certain facts are clear:

- One is that there are vast armies of fossils which show us that there are modifications of both plants and creatures within a commonly recognizable group or family. Dogs are an example. There are many kinds of dogs, from big St. Bernards to tiny Chihuahuas that you can hardly believe are dogs at all. Yet these both belong to the same family. They are equally dogs, strange as it may seem when you look at them. But these dogs, of whatever variety they are, never graduate into cats or horses or donkeys. They remain forever dogs.
- Furthermore, it is quite evident that all living things possess this amazing power to reproduce true to type. It is incredibly difficult to produce real deviations. If you turned all the dogs loose and let them run together, in a relatively short time they would revert to a common ancestral type which would probably be very much like a wolf. The strains which we produced by careful selectivity would simply disappear. Thus modifications are contained within the limits of *kind*.

In a fourth scientific comment on this passage, we read, “God saw that it was good,” and this, of course, means that it was in harmony with his nature of love, and in line with his ultimate purpose to produce man at last upon the earth. It aimed in the

direction God was going. God called it *good*. Today when men are concerned about the rapid utilization of physical resources we find ourselves very much in the same position of Mother Hubbard, who, when she went to the cupboard to get her dog a bone, found that when she got there the cupboard was bare. Increasingly today we are finding an empty cupboard. But here is the record of God’s love and concern stocking the cupboard for the appearance of mankind to come upon the earth.

All of this, as I have earlier suggested, is a reflection of truth on the spiritual level. All of this is designed, not merely to satisfy our scientific curiosity, but in a most remarkable way is designed to teach us something about ourselves. We are the end-products of God’s purpose in earth and all this finds its purpose and culmination in the human race. What is it designed to teach?

The very fact that this occurred on the third day is significant. In the Bible, the third day is the day of resurrection, the power of a new life. Here is a suggestion, a hint, this early in the Bible, that it is only that which takes place in the power of a new life, a new birth, a resurrected life, that can produce a fruitful humanity. It was on the third day that God called forth fruit upon the earth.

Further, that fruit is produced only by the life of God at work in man. Just as God said to the earth, “Earth, bring forth fruit,” so he says to the life of Jesus Christ in every one of us who know him: “Bring forth fruit.” The only thing that makes the fruit possible is the fact that there is a life from Christ within. If you do not understand this, then you do not understand what it means to be a Christian. If your concept of a Christian is that of being a religious person who goes to church and sings hymns and tries to live a good life, then you will not know what I am talking about, because you do not know what it is to be a Christian. A Christian is a new being, produced by a new life that has been imparted to him. It is only when he possesses that new life that there is any chance at all that he can be what both he and God desire.

What does God want you to be?

- You women (it is always proper to start with the ladies first), what does God want you to be? Could you put it in one sentence? The Bible does. There is a very beautiful phrase in First Peter, in which Peter says that women are to have “a meek and quiet spirit,” {1 Pet 3:4

KJV}. I know that word *meeek* is throwing some of you right now. If you think of it as a kind of simpering obsequiousness in which you must give in to anything anyone wants, then you are quite right in throwing it out. But meekness is really “strength under control.” What God wants in a woman is a gracious, disciplined character whose chief quality is gentleness; strength controlled by gentleness, that is beauty of spirit. That is what God wants in a woman. It is simply impossible, no matter how many charm courses you take, how many bottles of lotion you buy, how many tons of cream you smear upon yourself, to produce that kind of beauty. It is possible only through a sharing of the life of Jesus Christ.

- What does God want in you men? He says very plainly in the closing chapter of First Corinthians, “quit you like men, be strong” {1 Cor 16:13b KJV}, be courageous. That is what God wants in a man. Strength of character, strength and courage, united. That is the essence of manhood, as beauty of spirit is the essence of womanhood. What does it take to produce it? The life of Jesus Christ. You cannot be a man without Christ. You never will be the man you want to be without Jesus Christ. If you shut him out of your life your manhood will increasingly deteriorate till you yourself are aware of what everyone around you has known for some time, that you are not a man, not anywhere near the man you want to be. This is what God is teaching us here. Fruit can only be produced by the earth, and the earth, rising out of the seas, is a picture of the new humanity, the new race of man in Jesus Christ.

You will notice also that Moses divided this into three levels. We spoke of this earlier. Why does the Bible divide plant life into three major divisions? Because throughout the Scriptures you can trace a three-fold division of the fruit that comes from humanity:

- Jesus said that when a sower went forth to sow, he spread his seed upon the wayside. Some fell on hard, rocky ground, some on the thorns, some where the sun would burn it up, but some fell on good ground and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundred-fold: three divisions.

- John, in writing his first letter, describes Christians in three ways: little children, young men, and fathers. There are thus three divisions of manifestation of the life of God, the fruit of the Spirit.
- There are also three kinds of food mentioned in the Scripture for the spiritual life. There is:
 - the milk of the word,
 - the bread of life, and
 - the strong meat of the word.
- There are three divisions of reward awaiting those who fulfill the life of faith: praise, honor, and glory.
 - Every man shall receive praise, says the apostle {cf, 1 Cor 4:5b};
 - but the Lord Jesus said, “If any man will serve me, him shall my Father honor,” {John 12:26b KJV}.
 - And there will be those who will share with him the fullness of his glory, when he comes {cf, 2 Th 1:10}.

There are other three-fold designations like this found elsewhere in Scripture.

Finally, God looked at this wonderful world, filled with the beauty of plant life, green, lush, ready for the animal life that was to be introduced into it, and said, “It is good.” It pleased him. Thus when God looks at a humanity which once was self-centered, concerned only about its own desires and its own ways, living for itself in willful self-indulgence, and sees it turned and headed in another direction, and made to live for others and to be concerned about other matters than “what is happening to me?” When the big “I” fades into the background, and there comes a warm compassion and an outgoing spirit, and a willingness to serve and help others, God says of that: “It is good.” It pleases him. It is a life pleasing unto the Father. It is to this we are called. This is in line with his purpose, and he has provided everything it takes to produce it. As Peter says, “His divine power has granted to us all that pertains unto life and to godliness,” {2 Pet 1:3a RSV}.

I am finding that everywhere I go today there is an increasing hunger for this kind of life. There is a great unspoken, mute plea visible in the eyes of young men and women all over the world today to learn the secret of life, to discover how to fulfill their manhood and their womanhood, how to be what God wants them to be.

I walked about the campus at Wheaton College the other day. They were preparing for their Homecoming Game and there were the usual crepe banners hanging from the buildings and trees, and on the sidewalk certain displays and signs, containing sometimes statements of Scripture from a modern version and, in other places, epigrams. One of these struck my eye as I walked about. It declared, "We see the things that are, but who are we?" That seemed to me to be very expressive of what is in the heart of everyone today.

This question is producing the surging agony of restless humanity in our day, a cry for a God whom men seem unable to find and yet when he makes himself known they resist his call and do not want to yield to his loving ministry. That is what creates the tension of life. God calls us to be fruitful, to produce the same fruit which our own heart hungers to have. Why then, when he makes known to us the way this fruit is produced, do we rise up and push him back and fight for our own self-interests, clinging constantly to these withered, decaying bits of self-life which render us so barren?

Why is this?

Why do we not yield ourselves to the fruit-producing qualities that God has called into being in the new man, Jesus Christ?

When we do, we discover that it is all true – the old life begins to fade and all things become new.

Prayer:

Our Father, there may be some here who are ready to give up trying to produce true humanity in any other way than by the way you have determined. We pray that in this very moment they may open their hearts to the Redeemer, to the Savior, to the Lord Jesus, that they will welcome him and cease their resisting. For our part, Lord, who have already done this, we pray that we will recognize that we are only cheating ourselves when we do not give full reign to Christ's rule over our lives. We are only inhibiting our own lives and the glory that was intended for us. Our Father, we pray that you will help us to open our hearts and minds to hear anew and afresh, and that, here and now, we may produce on this earth that which is the hunger of your heart, a humanity that is strong in the courage and greatness of manhood, and winsome and gracious in the beauty and the glory of womanhood. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.