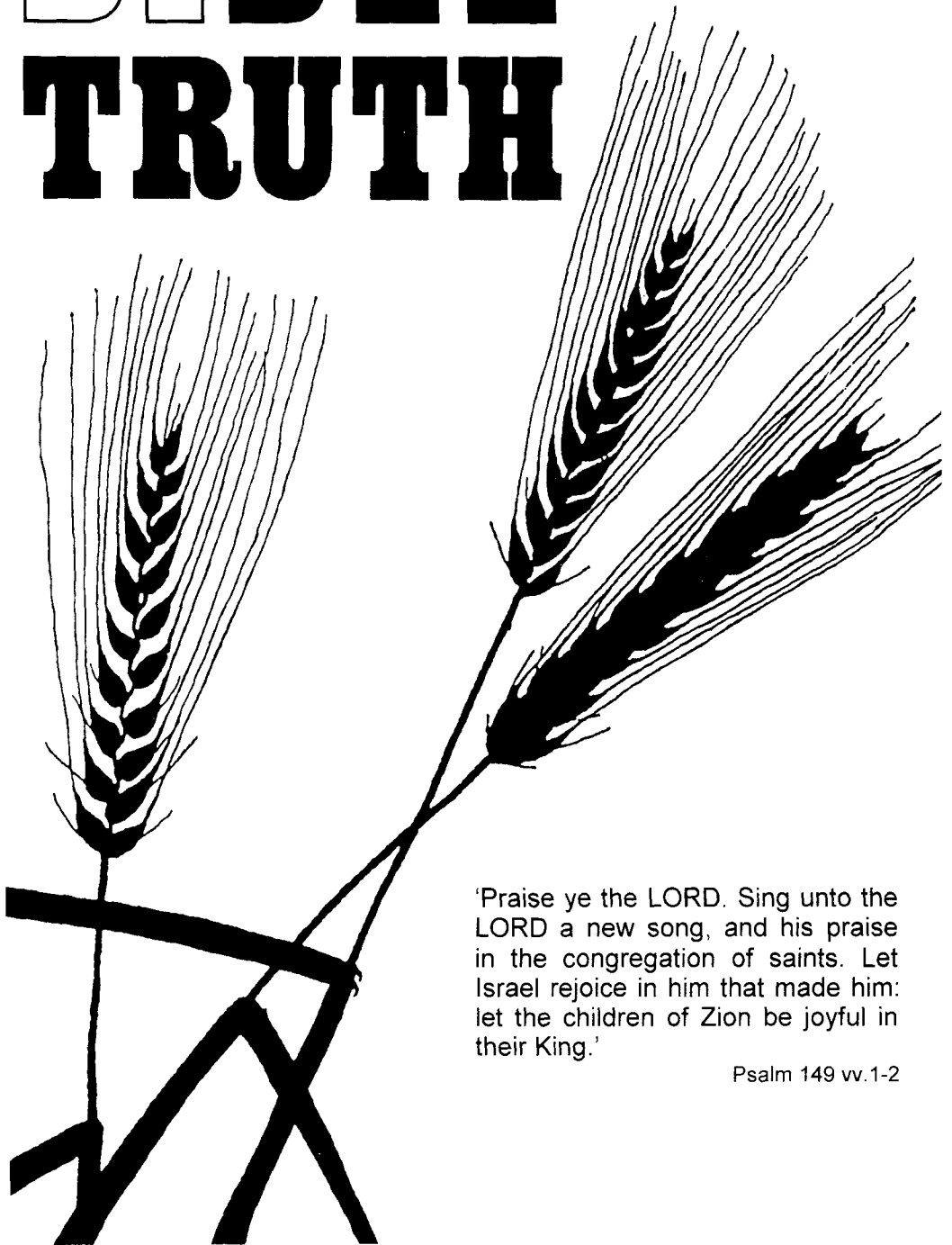


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'Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.'

Psalm 149 vv.1-2

WATERS ABOVE THE FIRMAMENT

by Dr Michael D. Bennett

The account of creation in the first chapter of the book of Genesis contains the following revelation regarding God's activity on the second day.

'And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.'

Genesis ch.1 vv.6-8

What is recorded is the creation of the earth's atmosphere (the first heaven) referred to here as 'the firmament'. Moreover, the account explains that the atmosphere occupied a position between two masses of waters. The first waters were under the atmosphere, while the second were above the atmosphere.

The first mass of waters was very considerable and soon became the world's seas, in the next phase of creation (on the third day).

'And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.'

Genesis ch.1 vv.9-10

There is no further specific mention of the second mass of waters ('under the firmament') in the creation account. However, there is good reason to believe that they also constituted a considerable mass.

In the early scheme of things, nature did not depend on rain from clouds high in the atmosphere for plant growth. According to Genesis, the first condition in nature involved a mist arising from the earth, to water the earth. However, this was a gentle circulating process involving only the waters under the firmament.

'And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.'

Genesis ch.2 vv.5-6

It is interesting to note in passing that to this day some plant associations are watered only this way, for example, the cloud forests. Moreover, gardeners know well that plants can be watered in this way, and use misting to good effect while propagating many species.

It appears from the Genesis revelation that this early misting system functioned throughout the dispensation on earth before the great flood, and indeed, so that it did not rain on the earth before the time of Noah's flood. However, there was heavy rain on the earth, perhaps for the first time, at the time of the flood. Most interesting it also seems that this deluge involved not only the waters under the firmament, but also, and for the first time, those above the firmament.

'In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows [margin floodgates] of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.'

Genesis ch.7 vv.11-12

'And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered.'

Genesis ch.7 vv.19-20

It appears that the waters that were above the firmament must have played a vital role in destroying the world that then was. Indeed, that may have been the purpose for their creation, and location above the atmosphere.

Flooding the entire inhabited earth to a depth sufficient to cover the peaks of mountains would seem to require a large additional supply of water above and beyond that contained in the antediluvian seas. Thus, the Genesis account has a remarkable internal consistency in describing such a supply, namely: the waters above the firmament.

It is worth noting in passing that the laws of physics require that in order to remain above the atmosphere, such waters would almost certainly have formed a large ring in orbit around planet earth, not unlike that found today around the planet Saturn. Thus 'the waters above the firmament' would not have formed a layer above the whole earth. In order to remain aloft they would need to move in orbit, and such movement would have tended to form an equatorial ring.

The Genesis account of creation has been scoffed at by numerous critics over many decades. Within this attack, the idea of waters above the atmosphere has been singled out for particular

scorn, as experts have denied their existence. However, the Bible states that '...many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased' (Daniel ch.12 v.4). It is interesting to note, therefore, that images recently captured by an orbiting American satellite could shed new light on this issue, and may confirm the correctness of the Genesis account of waters above the firmament.

The following short article was published in the Daily Telegraph (London) on Thursday, May 4th, 1997 (page 4) under the headline 'Daily invasion of ice cubes from outer space':

'A scientist who has spent 10 years trying to prove that Earth is constantly bombarded by giant ice cubes has finally proved his case, writes Aisling Irwin, Science Correspondent.

Dr Louis Frank, of the University of Iowa, persuaded a meeting in Baltimore yesterday that ice chunks the size of houses plunge into the Earth's atmosphere daily.

Dr Frank, working on information from Nasa's Dynamics Explorer 1 spacecraft, became convinced in 1986 that the icy chunks were arriving at a rate of up to 30 a minute. But other astronomers dismissed his ideas, which would have meant a new type of object in the solar system. Dr Frank told the American Geophysical Union yesterday that another Nasa satellite had captured images of 20-tonne ice cubes hurtling towards the Earth.

The American space agency confirmed that its Polar satellite had spotted the objects disintegrating at high altitudes and depositing large clouds of water vapour in the upper atmosphere.

Dr Thomas Donahue, of the University of Michigan, said: "The Polar results demonstrate that there are objects entering the Earth's upper atmosphere that contain a lot of water". The chunks posed no threat, said Dr Frank. "They break up and are destroyed at 600 to 15,000 miles above the Earth."

Scientists thought they had already accounted for the levels of water vapour in the upper atmosphere. The extraterrestrial water means they may have to rethink these theories.'

Whether this newly discovered phenomenon is synonymous with remnants of the waters above the firmament is unknown, but it seems quite possible. The total amount of water now reported to be raining down on earth's atmosphere is not inconsequential. Indeed, it would constitute over 600 million tonnes, if arriving constantly at the present rate since Noah's flood, and probably much more if this rate has reduced over time. It is surprising that such an interesting story makes no reference to the Bible, and that its publication would pass unnoticed, and uncommented on, by most of the Christian press.

Whether this new discovery is synonymous with remnants of the waters above the firmament is still uncertain, but it seems possible. More work concerning the origin of this water is needed, and especially to see whether it is associated with earth's orbit or if it comes from deeper in space. The former would be true for 'waters above the firmament'.

Be that as it may, while most modern men may deny and ridicule the idea and existence of waters above the firmament, the Psalmist knew that they were still there in his day, and he understood that they have a continuing purpose to the praise of their Creator.

'Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created.'

Psalm 148:3-5

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