



THEOLOGY CORNER

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“The Book of Genesis is a Myth, but is it Fiction?” (Part III - 7 Days of Creation)

We will now close up this three-part series on the myth of Genesis by discussing the seven-day structure of creation. I mentioned in Part I about how the first eleven chapters of Genesis served as “anti-myth” against the polytheism (belief in multiple gods) of ancient Mesopotamia. This understanding is very helpful in interpreting the seven days of creation because it serves as a backdrop illustrating that the author(s) of Genesis are making a statement about the one, true God who created the world out of nothing. To say that “in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1) was an immediate attack on ancient near eastern myths like the *Enuma Elish* because Genesis signified that creation flowed out of one source who creates through his Word (*logos* in Greek, *dabar* in Hebrew). See Part I of this article for more background on this.

Now, when it comes to the seven-day structure of creation, we want to avoid reading it literally because 1) it is not the intention of the author for it to be read literally; and 2) it would not make sense to do so. Why? One reason would be because it would be wildly incoherent that God create “light” on the first day and the sun and the moon on the fourth day. Another would be that God does not have a body and would therefore not be “tired” from creating and needing to rest. There are many more, but this should get you thinking. So, if the Hebrew author is trying to illustrate something about the story of creation, then what is he actually saying? Hebrew narrative is rarely literal, but often seeks to use the common images or stories of the time to teach some truth. In the creation narrative, it is no different. After the opening sentence of the book of Genesis indicating that there is only one God, we then see a layout of God creating a dwelling place for all the things of the world. Instead of being a photographic representation of how the creation of the world went down, it is like a poetic telling of the story. Where the great lights (sun, moon, and stars) were seen as gods, we see that God creates even these to *fill* the sky. I italicize the word “fill” because this explains the six-day creation paradigm. We see in Gen 1:2 “that the earth was without form and void.” This serves as a hint for what follows because it is in the first three days that we see God bringing “form” into the world, and “filling” the void with creatures in days four through six.

Day 1 - He creates light and darkness

Day 2 - He creates the water and the sky

Day 3 - He creates the land

Day 4 - He fills the void with the sun, moon, and stars

Day 5 - He fills the water and sky with fish and birds

Day 6 - He fills the land with the animals and humans

Day 7 - God rests and enters into covenant with creation

An interesting fact there is that while the human person is the last and most special of all creatures made, the pattern does not end on the sixth day. Rather, it ends with the seventh day – God rests. He does not rest because he is tired; rather, he rests because it signifies God making a covenant with creation. It is a holy day that exists *for* us. Jesus tells us, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath.” (Mk 2:27). This rest in which we participate has been long understood as existing in covenant with God. In fact, the word for “seven” in Hebrew is “*sheva*” which means to swear an oath. It is through this exchange between God and man that we may become adopted sons and daughters of our Creator. It is this exchange that marks the very purpose of our creation – to commune with God and share in his divinity. One of the problems in our society today is that we act as if we were created to work. Our work is our life. This mentality always leads to spiritual death because it is contrary to what has been revealed in Genesis. We do not exist for work, we exist for rest in God. Work is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Work is given as a remedy for our sin, as a sacrifice that leads us closer to God in service to others. But work is not the end goal. This is what the story of creation is meant to do: 1) To combat the false narratives of the time; 2) to show that God is Creator of everything in the universe; 3) that all of creation is structured as coming from God and needing to return to him in a loving exchange of persons that we call *covenant*.

We see these truths echo throughout the entirety of scripture. David is told that he will be given rest from his enemies, and even more poetic is that the people of God, in their conquest of Canaan (the Promised Land) are told that it will be a place of rest. Our very own promised land (heaven) is our final place of rest, but we also partake of the Lord’s rest on his day (Sunday) as the commandment instructs us. It is on this day that we rest from our work, and remember that it is this time with God, and in communion with friends and family, that we experience the joy of living in the New Covenant while being reminded that our life does not revolve around our work, but that our work revolves around our rest in God which we find in the Holy Mass and in our special dedication to being intentionally present with God every Sunday.